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CHILD OF WONDER

AN INTIMATE BIOGRAPHY OF

A R T H U R M E E



THE JUBILEE PORTRAIT
BY FRANK O. SALISBURY, C.V.O.

Direct colour reproduction from the original by courtesy of the painter.

CHILD OF WONDER

AN INTIMATE BIOGRAPHY OF

A R T H U R M E E

BY SIR JOHN HAMMERTON



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DEDICATED
TO THE YOUTH
OF TWO GENERATIONS
AND OF MANY RACES
WHOSE LOVE OF KNOWLEDGE
WAS NURTURED
AND CHARACTER ENRICHED
BY THE WORKS OF
ARTHUR MEE
AND
TO YOUNG PEOPLE EVERYWHERE
TODAY

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TO Miss LENA FRATSON, Arthur Mee's devoted secretary, and sister of Mrs. Amy Mee, who so efficiently assembled all the essential documents, correspondence and personal records of her brother-in-law and placed these at the service of the author.

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TO Arthur's friend, Mr. FRANK O. SALISBURY, C.V.O. the distinguished painter, for permission to reproduce by direct colour photography his characteristic portrait painted as a souvenir of Arthur Mee's journalistic jubilee.

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I

'FOR ARTHUR MEE'

WHEN Arthur Mee died it was announced that he had left a last message for those who might wish to mark the occasion with some kindly thought of him. Would they do so by sending whatever they could afford to a home for poor or afflicted children, or to some children's hospital in which they were personally interested, with the simple direction 'For Arthur Mee'? This last wish of his was so completely in accord with the whole tenor of his mind and character throughout full fifty years brimming with joyful life and social usefulness, that in attempting a biographical record of that life and career the writer needs no greater incentive.

'For Arthur Mee' is the thought that will guide his pen through all the ensuing pages. For this simple phrase means vastly more than the mere words imply; just as his name, to those who knew him closely and understood his rare and joyous personality, meant so much more than a familiar symbol of success in the realm of books, so much more, indeed, in the good life than even those who had cause to bless him, to hold him in loving remembrance, may have fully appreciated. Any sustained study of his character will reveal complexities which are surprising where all seemed so simple, so forthright. Those whose life-work has been the study of the child mind will be the first to expect this; they know there are few studies more complex.

The Arthur Mee known to his world-wide public of readers, the Arthur Mee known to a large circle of acquaintance as a most attractive individual, the Arthur Mee familiar to a relatively small

circle of friends, were all different characters, yet all of a piece in the sum of things that mattered; complementary, not contradictory. In the final analysis it will be found that the Arthur Mee that is assured, as much as any unique and forceful personality can be assured, of some measure of enduring life-force in the minds of his contemporaries and of those who follow after, was an 'Arthur Mee' whom Arthur Mee had projected by means of his own mental energy into a spiritual figuration of all the qualities he most admired in the good life of humanity. So that only the unthinking and the wilfully antipathetic will regard as touched with human vanity that final thought of his 'For Arthur Mee,' which was none other than his way of saying 'For humanity's sake.'

His life-story, apart from this true inwardness of his nature—if it is possible to think of things so interwoven as apart—is full of human interest and the romance of life. One of the many descriptions of him which I noticed in the papers at the time of his death, and which seemed to me a just one, described him as a 'Christian Romantic.' Assuredly his life as a journalist, editor, and writer of books was one of the most romantic of his time. As we were close friends through all the years of his brilliant achievement, indeed from his first emerging from his term of apprenticeship as a newspaper reporter, I may be supposed to possess the knowledge, whatever I may lack in the art of conveying it, which should furnish forth an adequate full-length portrait of the man. But it was not only the unceasing calls of my own editorial and literary obligations before and since the loss of my friend that prevented my suggesting to his family the writing of such a volume as this; there was also the thought that one who knew him a few years earlier in his youth and had long continued in his friendship might be contemplating the task I am now essaying. Only when it was represented to me by Mrs. Arthur Mee that if I could possibly see my way to attempt it she knew of no one whom her Arthur would more readily have named

had the question ever risen before his death, only then did I feel not merely justified in setting about this writing but under obligation to do so.

'No conventional biography of the "official" kind would I care to attempt,' was my first stipulation.

'Nor would anything have been less to the liking of my Arthur,' was the prompt response. 'All his life he disliked every sort of officialism and was always something of a rebel against formalities.'

'I think of calling the book *Child of Wonder: an Intimate Biography*,' I went on.

'What a lovely title,' remarked Miss Lena Fratson, Arthur's sister-in-law, who was his devoted amanuensis for over twenty-five years. 'For that is just what he was to the very end.' And Amy Mee agreeing, that settled the matter. What I shall endeavour to produce will be as little like an official biography as I can contrive to make it. It will put on record all the essential facts of his life, but in the recording of them I hope somehow to convey to the reader the essence of the things that made him so different from almost everybody I have known. He was no deep thinker who set himself to ponder over the ways of the world in which he had come to life, but just a healthy-minded human being greatly gifted beyond the ordinary healthy-minded human being, and for that reason, with perhaps a score of others that will emerge, destined to leave his impress on his age.

Yet Mrs. Mee was almost timorous in approaching me on the question of a biography, as someone who might have known better had doubted if there was enough in Arthur's life to furnish material for a biography 'because he had travelled so little.' Not enough! As a matter of fact, he had travelled fairly widely in all the Mediterranean lands, and in his native England more widely than anyone known to me. But most of all had he travelled in the Realms of Gold, and all who have read only a few of his numerous books have

good cause to feel happy that he brought back such spoil of travel from these, the richest lands of all. Apart from his famous series of topographical books *The King's England*, I do not think that if he had travelled the world over he would have used his talent to such fine purpose as he did in the veritable library of books he wrote and edited, mainly from the hilltop in Kent which he deliberately made the pivotal centre of his world and from which his tables of orientation, mental and material, all took their start.

Although I have noticed occasional quotations in his writings from one of my favourite philosophers, George Santayana, I should not credit him with any deep study of the theory of Essences, but I am sure that in many of his writings and in his way of life he was inclined to symbolise the good life in terms of essences which would have been acceptable to that most humane of modern philosophers. He would have had difficulty in understanding how Santayana could avow himself 'the last of the materialists' and yet remain within the communion of the Roman Church; but Arthur himself presented a similar enigma in holding fast to the sectarianism of his father while keeping in step with all the advances of science from Evolution to the Splitting of the Atom. What his attitude to the atomic bomb would have been can only remain a matter of speculation, but I do not think it would have daunted him or lowered his faith in humanity or his belief in things divine had he lived to hear of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. *The Children's Newspaper*, which was but one of his many inventions, was started 'to make Goodness News.' Not merely to interest and amuse or to instruct children in what Dr. G. M. Trevelyan calls the merry-go-round of unrelated things. To make goodness news was a far finer adventure than to travel the world by sea or land or air, and he found he could do it from a hilltop in Kent. How he managed to do this is one of the most thrilling of the innumerable stories that have been written about any village boy who made himself a power in his land.

Of all the expressions of regret at his passing, many of which came from men and women eminent in the social life of his country, there was one brought to my notice just as I began assembling my notes and data for this volume that would surely have given him the same feeling of pleasure, could he have had foreknowledge of it, as he doubtless experienced in anticipation when he thought of donations 'for Arthur Mee' going to those children's homes. More than two years had gone since his death ere this letter arrived at the desk where he had sat through one of the most important periods of his editorial life. Perhaps in a conventional biography such a letter would be reserved for the closing pages, but I am giving it here because it adds point to certain of the reflections I have just set down.

The letter was addressed to the new editor of the Children's Newspaper, who now sits at that historic desk from which Arthur so long kept contact with the children's world of his time, indeed with the great world of affairs—for if a census of his reading public were possible I believe it would include as many adults as adolescents. It had been posted at Ararat, an Australian town which is farther away from England than the more celebrated mountain of that name. Its writer, an enthusiast for child education, had evidently been one of Arthur's countless correspondents: a lady named Mrs. Mary Norman-Bail, Principal of an institution called St. Andrew's Path Finder, at Ararat, Victoria:

26 August, 1945.

I think my other letters must have been captured, as I've had no reply. Our School mourned for Arthur Mee, for we knew we had lost our Great Leader and teacher. We kept the flag at half-mast for a whole week and the whole of that time was devoted to studying and reading his writings. I cannot get a copy of *Immortal Dawn* in the whole of Australia. I've been trying since the year it was printed, so I wonder if you would send us one, please. But I have had the fortune to receive nearly all the Papers during the War. I have had them bound for School reference up until 1943. I can

assure you we value all the work he has done; his place will not be filled in the decade.

Here truly was a fine expression of thanks for the inspiration he had sent forth to the young folk of far-off Ararat and their leader who kept their flag at half-mast 'for Arthur Mee.' A far cry from his hilltop at Eynsford to Ararat in Australia, but it had been heard to some purpose. What Fleet Street editor has had such royal honour when his long day's task was done?

Nor is it inappropriate that here I should mention another letter, from an unknown correspondent, which has come to me personally when in the act of penning this opening chapter. The lady who wrote it is but one of the many who, in the three years that have elapsed since his death, have been increasingly sensible of the personal loss which, in common with so many thousands of young and old the world over, she has suffered in the knowledge that the lively and lovable personality of Arthur Mee has gone from the world of actualities and must now be sought in his writings; though there is a larger sense in which his influence may actually be increasing rather than diminishing. This letter, moreover, is a further encouragement to me in my present task, as the reader will perceive. The writer of it is Miss Helen M'Intosh of the Royal Hotel, Somerset East, South Africa, and its date is January 13, 1946:

You may think it strange that I should write to you, until I have mentioned my subject, which is 'Arthur Mee.' To me, like thousands upon thousands of others, young and old, Arthur Mee's books have for many years been a source of inspiration and delight. The Children's Encyclopedia, My Magazine, and later his own wonderful books, have been part of my literary enjoyment all through my life, and even now to dip into any of his books brings sheer delight.

It was only during the last few years that I had the thought of writing to him, and during the war I have had several letters from him, one in his own handwriting. . . .

'FOR ARTHUR MEE'

After his death I wrote to the C.N. to ask if he had written an autobiography, or whether there might be a biography of his life to be published, as I knew so little of his personal life and would like to get such a book. . . . I am now writing to you because at the end of the Arthur Mee Memorial number of the C.N., there was a lovely tribute from you to your friend, and I wondered if you would not be the man to write his biography.

It cannot be said in the case of Arthur Mee, that 'the evil that men do lives after them, the good is oft interred with their bones.' He has left nothing that is not 'true and lovely and beautiful and of good report,' and few men can claim to have done this.

No handful of paragraphs that I have ever written has brought me so many expressions of approval as the lines to which my correspondent above refers. They were written in haste for the issue of the Children's Newspaper that was going to press a few hours after the death of its founder, and although my impromptu tribute to my departed friend has been reprinted in many quarters, including one of my own books, there are many to whom it may well be unknown, so that I shall not apologise for reprinting it once more where it is so fittingly in place. For in some sort this biography must also be a testament of friendship, and these lines that I wrote under stress of emotion will serve, I hope, to key the larger work upon which I have now entered, and which, so far as it is a character study, will be an elaboration of this quickly written appreciation. 'For Arthur Mee' might well have been its title.

Even in these days when sorrow is so universal there will be many thousand hearts the sadder from the passing of Arthur Mee, that restless, brave, and stimulating soul whose chosen vocation had won him a unique place in the affections of at least two generations of young readers. Although by nature shy and retiring, he possessed a strong and insistent personality which demanded of him the utmost in self-expression, and it was the struggle between these two opposites in him that gave such vivacity and energy to all he wrote, and said, and did.

No contemporary who, like him, was primarily an editor (and he was

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an editor tingling with ideas for others to develop) has himself written so much or so well. Nor, one might add, to worthier purpose; for in nearly half a century of friendship, and in splendid years of close collaboration before the last war, I have known him to his final day as always the same eager champion of all good works in human endeavour which he set out to be with the maturing of his brilliant gifts as creative editor and writer.

Himself a child of wonder moving through a world of endless surprise to his questing mind, the keen edge of his interest and joy in life was never blunted: it might indeed be said that he never quite 'grew up.' But what was more exceptional was his capacity for communicating to the young minds around him, in that world where he himself seemed not to grow old, the marvel, the splendour, the beauty of it all even under the dense cloud of War that is now for a time over-shadowing the simple, natural, good, and everlasting things in which his own bright soul rejoiced.

In this regard his amazing energy of spirit which fired a frail bodily frame to the production of so vast a total of books and periodicals mainly for the instruction and entertainment of young readers has been of incalculable good to many millions (no figure of speech this) throughout the English-speaking world, while in the Spanish-speaking world, in France, in Italy, and even in China there must be hundreds of thousands to whom the Children's Encyclopedia, either as *El Tesoro de la Juventud*, or *Qui? Pourquoi? Comment?*, or *La Enciclopedia dei Ragazzi*, opened for them a magic door to world-knowledge which would not close again in their lifetime.

Here is Arthur Mee's great reward in the creating of the Children's Encyclopedia—'the book of my heart' as the romantic in him liked to call it—though he told the present writer that above all his many satisfactions in life was the founding of the Children's Newspaper, which he wished to be his 'monument.' We may be sure that among his ultimate conscious thoughts as he was losing consciousness, alas for ever, pending that grave operation at King's College Hospital on Thursday, May 27, 1943, was the C.N.

II

THE BOY: WHAT WILL HE BECOME:

WHO may have been the wit that changed the operative word of 'Sweet are the uses of adversity' to 'advertisement' I know not, but he hit a nail very neatly on the head. The useful art of advertising was in its infancy when Arthur Mee was a boy, its perverse outgrowth known as 'propaganda' had attained its zenith at his end. During the years in which the art of advertising had so vastly increased the mean of human happiness and comfort there was no 'copy writer' in the U.S.A., or in his native England, who, at least in my judgement (and I am not without experience in this field), could have excelled Arthur Mee had he cared to commercialise his talents instead of devoting these to the furtherance of causes that appealed to his heart. As it is not far short of two centuries since Dr. Johnson wrote in *The Idler*, 'Promise, large promise, is the soul of an advertisement,' it is clear that the art is more ancient than I am suggesting; but for practical purposes it was at least in its youth, if not its infancy, when Arthur was playing about the village fields of Stapleford, where quite probably on one or other of the gable ends of the buildings a certain poster had been fixed by those mysterious persons then so often the object of police threats: 'Bill stickers.'

Be that as it may, this historic poster was highly important to Arthur and many another of his generation, which is my reason for enlarging a little upon it here. It announced a new edition of Cassell's *Popular Educator*. That epoch-making publication had first appeared more than twenty years before Arthur was born, and

John Cassell, the teetotal tea merchant of the Strand who was the first to give a push to popular education, had been dead for ten years before Arthur was born, but the events were all related. This afore-said poster was a fine piece of publicity in a good cause: it appealed directly through the eye to the mind. On the left there was a portrait of any good-looking English boy; such as Arthur Mee was at the time, for he derived his pleasing mien from a mother noted for her attractive personality even in her old age. And stretching to the right were two rows of faces representing the future mutations of that boy: 'the boy, what will he become?' In the upper line we saw him as he progressed from a smart young clerk in a bank or commercial house to book-keeper, cashier, manager, and finally head of the concern with the familiar Victorian appurtenances of side whiskers, *pince-nez*, and fashionable necktie. In the lower we saw him, alas, steadily losing caste until he had become a creature of contempt, a sot, an outcast from society.

This poster, which was really an 'ower true tale' of the social contrasts of those days, and has by no means lost its point even seventy years on, was a pictorial embodiment of many temperance lectures which good John Cassell, the tea merchant, had given all over the country before he turned publisher and founded a famous business, known in later years as the House of Cassell. The impulse behind it had probably more to do with raising the standard of English social life than any Act of Parliament, and everything to do with the shaping of Arthur Mee as one of the most noteworthy, nay, one of the most genuinely inspired, educators of his time. We know to what heights he attained by emulating that boy in his progress along the upper line, and how to the end of his days he sought to rescue all boys from falling into the abyss of wasted humanity so vividly illustrated by the faces in the lower row. The turning-point of his career as a journalist was to come with the making of a new Self-educator for the people, but it would be foolish to suppose that

either Henry or Mary Mee had the faintest notion of the distinction in store for their firstborn son when they were packing up for removal to Nottingham. That son himself, when he left Stapleford with his brothers and sisters to begin in earnest the battle of life, may have had some glimmer, for the 'something not ourselves,' to which he often makes reference in his writings, could already have been at work.

Our child of wonder first opened his eyes in the strangely fascinating world where he was to grow up and attain for himself a position of usefulness and importance which no one present in the cottage home at Stapleford, on July 21, 1875, would have had the temerity to prophesy for him. No bright particular star stands over the birthplace of those whom nature has equipped for greatness, to mark their coming as no ordinary event, however much in fancy their admirers of a later day may be inclined to imagine some such sign or portent there.

In 1875 the little town of Stapleford, which lies some half-dozen miles southwards of Nottingham, on the boundary line between Notts and Derbyshire, was engrossed in its trades of lacemaking and coalmining, the former of these employing the majority of its five or six thousand inhabitants, the coalmines the minority. In those days Nottingham and the countryside for many miles around formed the centre of the great industry of lacemaking which within two decades was to enter upon a period of decline from which there has been hardly any recovery to this day, and Stapleford was one of the various satellite towns where the delightful craft of lacemaking almost disappeared, leaving the getting of coal a greater industry. In more recent years its population has increased somewhat, and in the motor age its industries have become more diversified. But, so far as I remember it in my cycling days of fifty years ago, it was just one of the many villages which strewn the green Midlands with charming old churches and cottages that had been engulfed in the

featureless new homes of the workers whom the Industrial Revolution had brought there to live. Its beautiful old parish church had not been spoilt, its Anglo-Saxon cross bespoke an antiquity which nothing else suggested. Fortunately, the industrial age which did so much to spoil the rural beauty of our country could not quite destroy the loveliness of the green hills, the bosky dales, the little waters that threaded their ways to the Trent; even Nottingham itself, great city though it had grown now, still clung to some things that were more in harmony with the rural village than with the modern industrial town.

But the abode of worthy Henry Mee, a working engineer, differed in no material way from many of the other artisans' houses that had been erected by speculative builders, encouraged by the employers for the housing of the 'hands' required to make their machinery productive. The days of such industrial amenities as Bournville and Port Sunlight were as yet a long way off. Nor were these ever to come to Stapleford; it remained a small centre of small industries. The home which Henry Mee and his devoted wife—both noted for their pious way of life, which had good seasoning of mirth and laughter, thanks to Mary's gift of humour—were enriching with a fine family of boys and girls was, in 1889, when Henry's employment involved removal to Nottingham, already housing no fewer than six of the new generation of Mees.

For some particulars of those early years of Arthur Mee, who was the second of the ten to which Henry's family attained after settling in Nottingham, the eldest being a girl, Annie, I shall now have recourse to a companion of his youth, an intimate friend and colleague through most of his life, Mr. Ernest A. Bryant, who had been Arthur's senior by a year or so on the reporting staff of the Nottingham Daily Express, his constant associate in his early life in London, and the most voluminous and versatile of the many contributors (mainly anonymous) to those serial publications which were to

make Arthur's name familiar as household words. According to Mr. Bryant, Arthur's father was a man of strong political and religious views, a Radical, a militant Nonconformist, an upright, earnest citizen, who would have gone proudly to the stake for his convictions. 'Apart from his family and business concerns, he devoted his life to his Baptist Chapel, of which he was a deacon, carrying his responsibilities with unsmiling gravity and inflexibility of purpose. He was noted for one peculiarity. Bearded with patriarchal plenitude, Henry Mee always wore, on Sundays or holidays and for travel, a near approach to the garb of a parson; the broad-brimmed hat, the long black frock-coat with erect collar. Humour was not an obtrusive element in his character, but he would laugh delightedly when mistaken, as he so often was, for a minister of religion, nor was he denied a tiny thrill of gratification over such misapprehensions which his beard and costume went so far to foster.

'A comfortable sense of approximate infallibility, with assurance of reward, well earned, in the hereafter, conditioned his outlook and fortified him in beliefs and theories which he cherished to the end. Never, for example, did he accept the statement that tadpoles develop into frogs or toads; he was a countryman born and bred and knew better than that, he said. And even when Arthur had attained professional eminence and reputation, his sire would close an argument with a forthright, "Nay, Arthur, my lad, you're wrong there!" There was much of Henry in Arthur in respect of confidence and ready acceptance of unexpected responsibility; not, indeed, of arrogation of infallibility in himself, but a logical realisation of his ability to discharge new and novel professional tasks which, to many men a little daunting, were to him matters to be taken in his stride. With talent matching his courage, he failed in nothing that he attempted.'

That is to me a revealing account of Arthur's father, and I would

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ask the reader to note it, for in seeking after hereditary characteristics before this vignette of his father came into my possession, I found myself speculating as to the origin of certain hortatory inclinations in his writings which made me wonder if he himself ever entertained notions of the ministry. Before receiving Mr. Bryant's illuminating notes, I had already penned the two paragraphs, which immediately follow, for inclusion at a later stage in my analysis of his character. These I will rather employ here in extension of Mr. Bryant's remarks upon Henry Mee, whose shortage of humour went with a deep and unassailable conformity of Nonconformity in all matters of religion, a conformity which only in his latest years Arthur ever showed any strong desire to modify. Far other were the qualities of mind and character that made his personality so much richer, so much more humanist than his father's, together with the conspicuous mental endowments which account for the boundless appeal of his written word. A story of his childhood which his mother loved to tell comes to my mind here. She found him sitting on a little stool beside the shining steel fender at the kitchen fire seemingly engrossed in reading a book. 'What are you reading so seriously, Arthur?' she enquired. 'I am learning how to rule the world!' he answered.

In thinking of a phrase that might best sum up the Arthur Mee I knew, I find myself falling back on a familiar Spanish one because it expresses so much more than its English equivalent: *muy simpático*. 'Very sympathetic' has nothing of the fullness of those two Spanish words. By long usage they have come to connote the best qualities of the heart, the mind, and the person. And I feel that all who knew him well, or even but slightly, will bear witness that he immediately gave the impression of possessing those qualities of personality which so continuously emanated from his writings. He exhaled the joy of life, his cheerfulness was infectious, nobody could well stay

THE BOY: WHAT WILL HE BECOME?

gloomy or hag-ridden in his company. Indeed, I have a feeling that if he had never made his name famous by his pen, he would still have been worth presenting to a wide public, simply as a delightful human being, although I confess myself unable to imagine any other calling wherein his native gifts of mind and person could have had full fruitage, save perhaps that of the ministry.

Great tracts of his writing could, by the occasional alteration of a phrase here and there, be shaped into sermons; but sermons of a vivacity and conviction which one has rarely listened to. Thanks, however, to the good fortune that protected him from 'waggin' his pow in a poopit,' his readers have been numbered by the million, and included many thousands who would else have turned away from sermons, spoken or written. Nor is there a doubt that he felt a 'call' as clearly as any that was ever heard by pulpiteer or evangelist. Read any of the hortatory books that he wrote between *Who Giveth Us the Victory* (1918) and *Immortal Dawn* (1941), and you will endorse this opinion.

It will be seen that the father was himself to some extent a dual personality: that too visual display of an inward attitude of mind being merely a cruder form of its expression than his son's habit of idealising the other Arthur Mee who was to become, as I have suggested above, the essence of all that Arthur himself wished to stand for as a prophet of humanity. The father had not been touched by the sacred fire of wonder, and as a consequence lacked that inquisitive nature without which there can be no continuous expansion of mind. But a worthy man no less and an excellent engineer, who was expert in his knowledge of machinery, a faculty which reappeared in more than one of his sons but was conspicuously absent in Arthur.

With all Arthur's curiosity as to how things were done, he was strangely unconcerned about 'how the wheels went round'! It is

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related that in the early days of his motor-owning he was trying to explain to some friends enjoying a run with him how the engine of his Daimler worked, but discovering that his mechanical knowledge was even less than his friends possessed, he gaily dismissed the problem by saying, 'Well, we know that somewhere down there among the levers a spot of petrol is working': a less mechanically minded person than this son of a mechanic never lived. His mind was always active in the realms of fancy, of the spirit, and could readily perceive the workings of nature but had no time for the details of carburettor or universal joint. All the minor mechanics of daily life he was content to take on trust from those who, like his father and one or two of his brothers, had the patience to master them. For his ready repartee, his smiling approach to any new or unfamiliar problem, he seemed to have been his mother's son. And he had need of this to modify the strain of puritanical seriousness which he derived from his father, and which in his earlier years was made to appear still more forbidding by reason of an embarrassing shyness.

It was probably a fortunate thing that the eldest son of the rigid Baptist and uncompromising Radical should have begun his education at an excellent school at Stapleford where the headmaster was the political opposite of Henry Mee and differed from him only a little less widely in religious beliefs. One who was acquainted with him has said, 'I know nothing as to his scholastic qualities, but I do know that George Byford imbued his pupils with character.' He has been described to me as 'a Tory of the deepest blue' to whom the natural order of things was permanently expressed in the famous hymn by Mrs. Alexander, wife of the Archbishop of Armagh:

*The rich man in his castle,
The poor man at his gate,
God made them, high or lowly,
And ordered their estate.*

THE BOY: WHAT WILL HE BECOME?

A hymn which, by a quaint irony of fate, was actually sung (that notorious anti-Jacobin verse discreetly omitted) at the memorial service to Arthur Mee at St. Dunstan's Church, on June 4, 1943. It was a happy fate, I suggest, that Arthur's schooling should have begun under a master of rare character who stood for so much that his scholar had been taught at home to regard as error, and the modification this was to work upon the raw ideas of youth will hardly need to be emphasised, as we follow his story and observe what the boy became. For the three commanding interests in his life that will pierce through all his manifold activities and achievements were his unshakable faith in the Christian ethic as based upon the Scriptures, his love of his native land, and his belief that the British Empire was the greatest force for world welfare—a belief which even its erstwhile critics and ignorant enemies are tardily beginning to share. That old Tory schoolmaster came into Arthur's life at the critical moment to restrain a boyish exaggeration of Radical thought.

The good George Byford, who had from the first been won to his somewhat revolutionary-minded pupil by the charm of the latter's simplicity, was an old-fashioned type of bachelor. A time was to come when he suddenly awakened to the call of greater things than spending his life at Stapleford and betook himself to Canada, there to imbue a new generation with a reverence for the Flag of Empire which his much-loved pupil was to celebrate more than fifty years later in *The Book of the Flag* (1941). But long afterwards he was to play a new rôle in the life of Arthur Mee.

Again I am indebted to Mr. Ernest Bryant for a reminiscence which links those days at the Stapleford school with the great days of the world-famous editor:

'George Byford undoubtedly left an impress of his own fine character on that of Arthur, who quitted the old school—of which he had always the happiest memories—a sound English scholar, but

too soon for even a peep into classical realms. He had no aptitude for chemistry, mechanics, or geometry, and as an editor he imagined that present-day pupils might have been equally unattracted by these subjects. Hence his disinclination to the use in his publications for the young of technical terms common to most schoolboys of today. Never would he use such words, for example, as "diameter" or "circumference," but always width, and so many feet or yards round. If a technical expression was not familiar to him, he argued, then it might be unfamiliar to thousands of others, both adult and juvenile. The practice had its disadvantages in lack of precision and directness, but Arthur had ever in mind the one who might not know and might be gruelled by technicalities.'

This glimpse of his life in his native village would indicate that he was still a country lad, with a rural style of speech so established that it took years of city life to smooth it into a closer resemblance to the admirable English he seemed to be able to write from his first efforts in composition. And this was now available with the larger life opening for the village lad in the thronging city of Nottingham, hitherto only occasionally visited from Stapleford in his vacations and doubtless at each recurring 'Goose Fair,' whose glories have long since departed. One thing was not in doubt, and that was in which of the two sequences of faces in that famous poster the growing Arthur's would be found.

III

'AS THE TWIG IS BENT...'

BEFORE we watch the boy in search of a career or consider the shaping of the young idea—'as the twig is bent the tree's inclined'—a word or two concerning his family name may interest the reader. It is not a common cognomen; few of its bearers were known to fame. Walter Emanuel of Punch remarked in his waggish way on my introducing Arthur to him some forty-five years ago, when he had already made his name familiar in journalism, that he wondered if it might have had a Chinese origin. It lends itself to such witticisms, a fact of which Arthur, with his keen sense of the ridiculous, was conscious; hence he never used the initial of his middle name, Henry. A. H. Mee offers too good an opening to the cheaply witty to conjoin A and H to produce 'Ah Mee,' and we may suppose that in his schooldays Arthur had often to listen to such facetiousness.

All such little jokes were taken in excellent part by Arthur, but they would seem to have set him to investigate the origins of the name, with some very unexpected results. This he did with the thoroughness which he brought to every quest that attracted him, being aided and abetted by numerous correspondents and the not unnatural supposition of news editors throughout the country, whenever an Arthur Mee came into the news as lecturer or agitator, that he must be *the* Arthur Mee, which led to many disclaimers and explanations. His researches discovered no fewer than twenty-seven Arthur Mees, some of whom had been locally notable in widely different regions. The earliest on his list kept a public-house in

Nottingham. And Arthur used to recall with amusement, in talking about his name, that even as a reporter, when attending the Police Court there, he had heard 'Arthur Mee' called to answer a charge of 'drunk and disorderly.'

On the whole, the Mees were not a particularly distinguished lot, the majority of them followed the humbler walks of life, though there was a good sprinkling of clergymen, schoolmasters, journalists, architects, and he found that Byron wrote a poem *On the Return of the Portrait of Mrs. Mee*. But with one fellow journalist of the same name there was for a time frequent confusion. This was Arthur Mee of Cardiff, whose journalism was mainly confined to the newspapers of the Principality, but whose writings on astronomical subjects, on which he was something of an expert, were more widely known. As I remember him, he might well have passed for an elder brother of our Arthur: a smallish man, with darker hair than his, he was the son of the Rev. G. S. Mee, minister of a Baptist Church at Aberdeen (1857-62), whose name is remembered to this day as that of a preacher of great eloquence. In fact, the celebrated Dr. Alexander Whyte of Edinburgh placed him amongst the greatest in Scotland at that time, which was praise indeed. The Rev. G. S. Mee had died in 1876, when Arthur was an infant at Stapleford, but that did not prevent the Centenary Souvenir of the Aberdeen Free Communion Baptist Church, in 1939, from claiming the now famous editor of the *Children's Newspaper* as his son. It also gave Arthur a fine opening for correcting the mistake with that grace he never lacked on such occasions.

'I congratulate you,' he wrote, 'on the Centenary of your church and wish it another Hundred Years of Good Parsons, Good Sermons, and Good Collections. I am not in any way related to the Rev. G. S. Mee, so that I am sorry I cannot hope to creep into your brochure unless it embraces well-wishers, in which case you can put me down by all means.'

From the notes which Arthur gathered concerning his family name, it would seem to have been localised at first in the Midland counties, although it is fairly well known in Flanders, with a number of variants, such as Mei, Meie, Mais, and Le May. But this is not a very profitable line of study so far as we are at present concerned, and with a glance at some collaterals of the Mees, who were more in the æsthetic tradition, I shall turn again to our protagonist.

One branch of the Mees was of the family that had as ancestor the husband of Anne Mee (1775-1851); she was a famous miniaturist of her time. Kirke White, the Nottingham poet, was another connection of a bygone generation of Mees, as were the admirable Howitts, William and Mary, whose indefatigable literary industry was to be more than equalled, nearly a century later, by Arthur Mee, their indirect descendant.

When in 1889 Henry Mee's employment involved the removal of his household to Nottingham, Arthur was in his fourteenth year. There was no urge at that time to retain children of the artisan class at school until they were sixteen. Another two or three years of pedagogy would have made little difference to his education, as his school knowledge was never of conspicuous use to him, who was essentially a student of men and events, ever eager for new knowledge to the last day of his life. Besides, there was need to get started in some sort of job, the resources of good Henry Mee being limited by the not very generous payment of mechanical engineers in those days. Arthur himself was all for making an early start at earning a few shillings to assist his frugal parents, whose family had now four other members younger than his sister Annie and himself to provide for.

But it was not in Nottingham that the twig of his mind was bent, nor was it even at the Stapleford school, but rather by his friendship with a fine old Methodist, Henry Mellows by name, a baker by trade. It would seem that before the cinema and professional foot-

ball, with its pools and mass hysteria, had come to smother the minds of the populace with diversions that left them little time to take a sustained interest in current politics, there were far more intelligent men like Mellows to be encountered in the country towns, and especially in the lesser townships that lay near the large centres of population. Nowadays the mass of voters is only temporarily weaned from its light-hearted affection for films and football at the approach of the elections, when their interest is hurriedly awakened by floods of oratory let loose upon them and their votes recorded in the excitement of the moment.

Mellows represented a type that has not increased in proportion to the growth of population: those who acquired a firsthand knowledge of current political affairs by following the daily parliamentary reports for themselves. To enable him to keep abreast of these daily reports, and also to give Arthur some idea of what they were about, old Mellows had the happy thought of getting the schoolboy to come each night to his bakery, and while he kneaded the flour and fired his loaves and cakes, Arthur could read aloud to him the full parliamentary news of yesterday. Here surely was the beginning of his lifelong preoccupation with politics, and also, I suspect, of his fondness for sweets and pastries, for Mellows would not let so useful a service go without reward at the very centre of the village supply of toothsome bun and biscuit. Those bakery nights were important; but equally, or even more important, there was the Sunday School where his endless interest in the Bible which his father had begun to foster as soon as the boy had mastered the art of reading was developing. 'His politics and his Bible, almost interchangeable terms with him then, were his intellectual and spiritual staple,' I have been told. And this might well have been said about him at almost any period of his later life, with due allowance for the multitude of other interests that arose from his ever-widening field of journalistic exploration.

Here I shall take advantage of some of the informative notes which Mr. Bryant has so kindly furnished for my guidance in dealing with those years that had been left behind Arthur, though not so very long, before we first met in 1895:

'The Mees were a singularly happy, devoted community, and the company of brothers and sisters younger than himself helped to sustain Arthur's juvenility of outlook, which might otherwise have yielded to influences oppressively serious in a lad whose reading was mainly scriptural and political. Fiction he viewed with contempt, with the reservation that, having gained as a prize a copy of Silas Hocking's *Her Benny*, he read it with delight, and long held its author in high esteem. Thus Arthur's reading was never gladdened by acquaintance with the masterpieces of creative fiction; indeed, he read astonishingly few novels throughout his career; to put the number at two score might be to exaggerate. So the company of the younger ones had the necessary mollifying effect upon a boy grave and staid beyond his years. With them in their infantile play and pranks he was felicity itself. To romp with the little ones was to him delight and entertainment beyond compare. And that mood of happiness in the company of children attended him throughout life.

'In general, however, Arthur in boyhood, although compact of intellectual mercury, was a sober-sided youth. He had no acquaintance with the gymnasium, the swimming-bath, or other kind of physical recreation. A nodding acquaintance with music led to his learning the elements of violin-playing, but that ended with a bang. He had advanced sufficiently to justify his performing at a children's concert, but too soon in his solo one of his strings snapped and struck him violently on the nose, so that it was not entirely chagrin that occasioned the tears with which he quitted the platform, never more to handle bow or fiddle. As an executant he could have had but slight hopes, for his ear was not acute, and he later made the rueful

confession, "When it comes to singing semitones I am really never quite sure whether I am going up or down".

For the moment I reserve my observations on Arthur as a reader of books, on which I may have a good deal to say, as I do not wish to thrust too far ahead of such slight narrative form as I may preserve, but which I shall not allow to overlay the intimate character study I am attempting to build up by means of little touches here and there instead of in one sustained piece of analysis. More will also be heard of our good friend Silas Hocking at a later stage, but bearing in mind that, by and large, Arthur's fame with the general public is mainly based upon his conquest of the child mind, I shall add a gloss here to Mr. Bryant's statement on this, a subject to which there will be occasion to recur more than once. It involves a forward leap of more than twenty years, but as this is no formal biography that presents no difficulty. It concerns a quaint confession Arthur once made to me, and confirms my own opinion, which I had formed more than twenty years before Mr. Bryant wrote his down.

For some years prior to 1930, when I became the tenant of a Pall Mall flat, Arthur and I usually forgathered at the Reform Club, of which he was a member, or at the Thatched House Club, where I was a member and lived for some years during my London nights after having moved my home to Eastbourne. At these almost weekly meetings we discussed most topics of the day, and especially those that in some measure touched upon our editorial interests. On one of these occasions Arthur, suddenly assuming a serious air, remarked, 'Sandy, I am going to make a confession: *I know nothing about children!*'

Now, such an admission from the editor of the renowned Children's Encyclopedia, who was looked upon in the two hemispheres as the most successful writer for children and the editor of the most acceptable children's books, might be thought astonishing by anyone who did not know Arthur Mee except through his

writings and the books he edited. But it did not surprise me, for I never was at any time under the impression that he did understand children! ‘How then do you account for his universal appeal to them?’ I may be asked. The answer is simple: he did not look at them objectively, he did not assume a pedagogic pose in addressing them, but in the most natural way wrote and planned for them to their complete understanding because he was always a child himself in his cast of mind but gifted with a power of forthright expression which endowed his thoughts, even when they concerned the simplest things, with some essence of the wonder that possesses all young persons in their early contacts with life and the realities of nature: that sense of wonder which dies only in the dull, the dismal, the sophisticated, and which the longer it is retained the happier it makes its possessor. No healthy children ever trouble their minds by trying to ‘understand’ other healthy children. And that is why Arthur Mee succeeded from the very first in winning the affections of the children of two generations: his sense of wonder never weakened, and this ‘confession’ made to me was merely a passing ‘wonder’ to himself while contemplating the success with which he had achieved his position as ‘the children’s friend’ without understanding children! It may have been that that ‘confession’ to me had a more immediate urge. As the doting father of a charming little daughter, he was at times defeated in his ‘grown-up’ efforts to please her, as in some amusing instances which I shall relate farther on.

He was less attracted by animal life than by the works and thoughts of man. He had but few animal pets about his home, other than dogs, and I had the impression that he was nervous at times lest one of these might bite his little daughter (who had no fear of any domestic animal), to whose well-being he related even such a question as vivisection.

‘Why should I attack vivisection,’ he once asked me, when a common friend of ours was urging him, ‘if it is true that it has led to

such discoveries in the treatment of human disease that the lives of Marjorie and children and grown-ups everywhere may be saved?' 'But *is* it true?' I would retort for mere argument's sake. 'Well, it is true,' he would reply, 'that as a result of medical science the average of human life in civilised society has been increased by fifteen years within the last century, and that is a great thing, which may only be the beginning of still further increases in the average spell of life.'

You will notice two things in this expression of his thoughts: (1) his instant reaction was concern for the well-being of his daughter as typifying all childhood, (2) an ardent desire to have his fill of years; this I know, and I shall have more to say on both counts. Two of the most natural human considerations, however lightly the philosophic mind might value them as contributing to any sort of philosophy.

One more characteristic of the boy which has not been reported to me but which I suspect from knowledge of the man on the principle that the boy is his father: his childlike impatience. In all the years I knew him he exhibited an impatience which had in it something of the spoilt child and something of the divine. Like any boy who has set his mind on a bicycle or a watch and 'won't be happy till he gets it' (like the infant and the soap in a once famous advertisement), Arthur made each new whim or each new idea of his the one thing to be attained. In idle fancies—let's say an ivory elephant, a monkey, any beast or bird that ivory-carvers choose for their miniature art—Arthur, having acquired one, would immediately resolve upon a herd, a flock, a gaggle, as the case might be. And when next you went to his home he would point out with pride how his searching had succeeded: a herd of a dozen ivory elephants, or monkeys, ranging in diminishing size from left to right, would grace the mantelpiece in his library. But when you went again the herd of elephants had been swept away to make

room for a gaggle of geese! This is no overdrawn description. He had a passion for collecting tiny ornaments of all sorts and a child's loss of interest in them when he had gathered as many as his fancy ran to.

It is all too easy in after years, possessing full knowledge of his subject's attainments, for a biographer to read into the mind of his subject thoughts and decisions that fit quite neatly into the character he is developing, but might well have been, so far as the time factor was concerned, far distant from that mind. I have no absolute evidence of the age at which Arthur first turned his thoughts to journalism, but since the environment of chance plays a prime part in the early stages of any noteworthy career, and may often be responsible for a large measure of what is commonly called 'destiny,' one is on safer ground examining the environment of a boyhood instead of fixing times and places of decision in the restless mind of the boy. Already we have had some indication of the outer influence which doubtless inclined the thoughts of Arthur Mee towards the profession for which his after years proved him to have been so abundantly endowed. But the opening of the door, which is all-important, would seem most often to be left to chance, and I suspect no other force than that took him one day in 1889 to the printing works of the Nottingham Evening Post, where they were requiring a copy-holder for one of the printer's readers; that and his own desire to get a job of some kind in connection with the printing of a newspaper. The bright, eager little schoolboy that he was had no difficulty in getting the job and so became a wage-earner and a neophyte in one of the most fascinating vocations invented by man.

It was thus by the lowliest door that he entered into journalism. A copy-holder, it should be explained, is a boy who sits alongside the proof-reader with the 'copy' (in those days usually hand-written in pencil on rough white paper or on telegram 'fimsies'), and his duty is to read aloud from the copy while the proof-reader checks

each word on the 'galley-proof.' The whole process of newspaper production has been completely revolutionised since the late 'eighties, when type-setting by machinery was coming into general use, but the task of the printer's reader and his copy-holder remains much the same today, though vastly speeded-up, as in the days of Caxton or of Plantin. The type set-up by the compositor is arranged in long, narrow metal trays (galleys) with stout flanged edges at each side, and at one end, within which it is temporarily secured with wooden wedges. The next stage is to smear the printing surface of the type with black ink applied by a small hand roller. A strip of paper is then laid over it, and an impression taken of the inked surface of the type. This is known as a galley-proof, but the origin of the term 'galley' is obscure. The reader corrects on the margins of the proof any mistakes made by the type-setter before the type is ready to be passed for making-up into page form for the actual process of printing. The whole operation is more elaborate than I have indicated, but we are for the moment interested in it only from the point of view of the copy-holder, who was in frequent touch with the editor, to whom he carried the corrected galley-slips after the proof-reader had done his work on them.

Now there came a day some thirty years after Arthur had sat down at the reader's desk in the office of the Evening Post, when that timorous little copy-holder, his first editor, and myself were all together at some exhibition display in London (the nature of which I have quite forgotten) and I discovered that the once dreaded editor was none other than Leonard Rees, the brilliant chief of the Sunday Times from 1901 until his death in 1932. Rees had been a friend of mine all through his London years, but not until that day had I known of Arthur's early association with him. It is worth remembering here, for I fancy it was not without influence in shaping the destiny of his printer's boy, as Rees was one of the kindest souls that ever occupied an editor's chair, and once Arthur's terror of his

presence had abated he could not refrain from encouraging the bright-eyed little chap who was in and out his room so often every day. Rees was one of the most cultured and literary of editors, more of a scholar than Arthur ever became, but his copy-holder was to outshine him in many other ways and leave a mass of literary work that will keep his memory green for years to come. The brilliant newspaper editor's fine contribution to journalism in the shape of drama, music, and literary criticism lies buried in the dusty files of the Sunday Times. That is too often the way of the journalist.

Never having had any word from Arthur to warrant my attaching the importance that I do to this earliest of his journalistic contacts, I record it on my own responsibility, for, although I esteem Arthur high among those of the grateful heart, who like to give as good as they get, and to remember good guidance, I imagine that at the age of under fourteen one is not likely to be fully alive to every passing influence that may help to the shaping of his own ideas. And I like to think that so great a journalist and so genial a character as Leonard Rees, even if the association was but slight, could not well have avoided exercising some impact on the mind of the impressionable boy whose thoughts were beginning to shape in the direction of journalism.

IV

ARTHUR'S 'OPEN SESAME'

WITH the removal to Nottingham in 1889, and the happy chance that brought him so quickly to the outer door of journalism, Arthur's school days in the conventional sense had ended; in the true sense they had only begun. At Stapleford he had at least acquired a sound elementary education well in excess of the three R's: 'Reading, 'riting, and 'rithmetic.' It was now up to him to use this basic knowledge so that it would swiftly grow from more to more and bring into play the native powers of a mind endowed with faculties of thought, of vision, of understanding and invention to an extraordinary degree.

All the ways of his life at this time were as humble as any romance writer could invent to colour a picture with contrasts of worldly success. The modern convention of biography, especially in the inventing of 'colourful' lives for film stars, which insists upon stressing the lowly origin of the subject so that the eventual attainment may stand out in ultra high relief, were here for the using: no need to exaggerate, to 'lay it on thick' in the approved Hollywood manner. But I do not recall the slightest inclination to this sort of romancing on the part of Arthur himself, with one solitary exception. He did on one occasion, when at the height of his productive prosperity, enjoying a measure of fame and fortune far beyond his youthful dreams, confess to me, when we were discussing the question of happiness and what the world esteems 'success,' that he sometimes found his memory fondly turning back to his early days in Nottingham. As junior reporter he had attained to membership of the

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Mechanics' Institute where a tuppenny pork pie and a cup of coffee with his friend Bryant seemed to be the food of the gods. 'Seemed to be,' was my comment.

This occasional trick of memory is familiar to all who have known the simpler satisfactions of life in their young days. But it certainly could not have been frequent with him, who lived with such pronounced delight in the sunshine of his own success, rejoicing in the power for good that he could wield through the affluence won by his own industry and ability. He was so keenly alive to the endless interests of his daily life that I am sure his mind was rarely touched by such nostalgic musings as those tuppenny pies and cups of coffee, or occasionally cocoa, a beverage which was enjoying an exceptional vogue in his young days.

A new and powerful influence came into his life in Nottingham in the shape of the Rev. G. Howard James, Minister of the Woodborough Road Baptist Chapel. Arthur responded warmly to the interest which Howard James took in his new adherent as the eldest of the sons of his new deacon, Henry Mee, who was already the father of six children and in six more years was to register another four to attain decimal completeness. My own meetings with Howard James were few but well remembered. He was little if any taller than Arthur, but of a fuller figure, and he looked far less a minister than Deacon Mee did in his Sunday garb. A genial human personality, he was just the kind (I had written 'type,' but he was not a 'typical' parson) of bright, vivacious, sympathetic human being to win the heart of the earnest but lively youth who would not have been attracted to the more common pulpit moralist which his own father rather favoured. I know he was much beloved by his congregation, and as the Mee family had settled in Woodborough Road a year or two after coming to Nottingham, those of them who survived at the death of Henry Mee in the old home there in 1930 still looked upon Woodborough Road with as much affection as

children of the Manor House for their ancestral demesne, we can realise how vital a part the neighbouring chapel with its minister must have played in their lives.

Howard James would certainly approve, and may indeed have helped to bring about the apprenticing of Arthur to the craft of newspaper reporting in 1891, when at the age of sixteen he was articled to the Nottingham Daily Express for a term of four years. An ardent Liberal, active in all progressive movements, and friendly with the directors of the Express, he both encouraged the deacon's son and promoted his application to join the staff of that organ of Liberalism. At the death of Howard James in 1919 Arthur wrote a tribute of affection to him in which he said: 'He was one of the world's rare men, selfless and honest in every hour he lived, and those whose lives were touched by his in the days of their youth will not forget him until they have forgotten their own name.'

I have recently examined that indenture in which all the conditions of Arthur's servitude are set forth. He had carefully preserved the document, like every other scrap of printed matter of a personal interest, as though he might have intended some day to compile a documentary record of himself. The word 'servitude' would seem to have come to my pen almost without choice, but I let it stand, for in reading through that somewhat forbidding engrossment it reminded me a little of the days when Roman fathers sold their sons into servitude, so binding and minatory is its phrasing. Among its many inhibitions the young apprentice bound himself (his father undertaking to enforce performance) not to gamble, drink, waste his employer's time, nor enter the state of matrimony! But never was there a series of commandments easier to carry out so far as Arthur was concerned, the chief bar to his entering 'the holy estate' being the absurdly small wages which he was to be paid, and which at the termination of his apprenticeship were not to exceed sixteen shillings a week!

Attached to the document there is a letter from the managing director of the paper asserting that all its obligations had been faithfully observed and that the whole period of apprenticeship had been 'spent in the Company's service faithfully, loyally, and obediently; in no respect could the Company desire a more satisfactory and efficient servant.' A characteristically phrased testimonial from one much given to clichés and redundancies of expression. He also had the satisfaction of looking back on those four years of Arthur's servitude as highly profitable to the company, the money paid being probably less than one-tenth the value of what the bound apprentice had given to the Express. I should imagine that this indenture was among the last effected in getting highly skilled labour for a newspaper at the lowest outlay, for all that the company provided was the opportunity to work assiduously seven days of the week under the instruction of the chief reporter, the learning of his craft being left to the ready wit of the apprentice himself. Apart from his natural gifts, which would make a great journalist out of him or leave him to the daily tasks of reporting for the remainder of his life, the main qualification was the ability to write Pitman's shorthand. This Arthur had acquired, like so many others, by the simple process of studying the necessary handbooks, and before he had been eighteen months on the Express there was no other reporter five or ten years his senior who could excel him in speed or accuracy as a note-taker.

Perhaps his self-acquired mastery of shorthand was really the most important factor in getting him a start. All things considered, and especially the skill with which he applied it, I should incline to describe shorthand as his 'open sesame,' which swung ajar the door that led to the wonder cave of journalism, where, once within, the lamp of his own genius proved as magical as Aladdin's. Like many another of us who learned shorthand in the same masterless way, he got his best practice in the art by taking down the sermons he

listened to in the Baptist Chapel and lectures given in the adjoining hall on literary and social subjects. One Sunday, it is related, a special sermon on some burning topic of the moment was preached at the chapel and the fifteen-year-old stenographer, who already was many years ahead of his age in sensing the news value of a speech or lecture, was impressed by the topical interest of the sermon he had been reporting for practice. He quickly decided to prepare it for publication.

Hastening home, he wrote out a transcript of the passages which he deemed most worth printing; he knew that no accredited reporters from either of the morning papers had been present, so that he had no rival in the field. He hurried off with his 'copy' (the first he had written), not to the office of the Guardian (the Tory morning paper on whose evening companion the Post he was still employed) but to that of the Express, whose political outlook was more in sympathy with the opinions of the preacher and the note-taker. Arrived at the then quite imposing Express building in Parliament Street (where it still stands unaltered externally though less imposing by reason of the many more massive buildings that have risen in the neighbourhood), he breathlessly mounted the wide stone staircase, but was overcome with shyness at the thought of knocking at the door of the editor's room. He compromised by pushing his manuscript through the letter-box of the reporters' room, and having made this offer to fate, bolted down the stairs quicker than he had gone up them.

Imagine the eagerness with which next morning the Express was scanned in the home of Henry Mee; the joy with which the young would-be reporter saw his fairly long transcript of that sermon, suitably headed, and sub-headed, in all the greatness of print! A notable moment; a thrill that comes but once.

I have mentioned sub-editing, a branch of journalism in which Arthur was to excel before he flew at higher game. It is really an art

in itself, and provides considerable scope for the display of individual taste and judgement. It used to be said that whatever might be one's opinion of W. T. Stead as an editor and publicist, he was the most competent sub-editor in English journalism. I would place Arthur Mee in his maturer years, after he had quitted Nottingham, as *proxime accessit* to that title. But nothing that he was to do in Nottingham would have warranted such praise, which is a way of saying that good sub-editors are made as well as born.

No doubt Arthur's observant eye, when he was copy-holding at the Evening Post, had noted the process of 'subbing' when he read out the sheets of copy to the corrector of the press, as the proof-reader is entitled to call himself by ancient usage. The sub-editor leaves his mark all over a reporter's or contributor's copy, and by tradition uses blue pencil, which has been enormously in demand by the thousands of censors throughout the world during the past six years. The censor is a destructive creature, a suppressor, but the sub-editor is mainly devoted to improvement, embellishment, and only in a lesser degree to excision. He writes the heading, the sub-heading, and the cross headings to the manuscript, alters here and there some phrase for greater clarity, marks the beginning of each new paragraph, sometimes 'runs on' two or three short paragraphs into one, or breaks up one that he regards as over-long into two or three shorter ones. In a word, the bald manuscript is the sub-editor's raw material, to be dressed up according to his own taste or the set style of the paper as originally determined by the editor.

All this Arthur as a humble copy-holder had ample opportunity to observe and profit by, which we may be sure he did, whereas many another in his place would have read out the copy for a year or two without learning a single thing about sub-editing. As it happened, however, it was not until the last year of his apprenticeship had gone that he became a sub-editor, when he was placed in charge of the evening edition of the Express, known

as the Evening News, so that he became sub-editor and editor at one stroke.

The editor of the Express at the beginning of Arthur's apprenticeship, and indeed when he made that bid for fortune with his report of the Woodborough Road sermon, was one of the friendliest of men and a public-spirited journalist who was as keenly interested in social welfare, municipal, educational, and philanthropic activities as in the practice of journalism. His fatherly interest in the bright new apprentice was just what Arthur needed to call forth his utmost effort to justify the confidence John Derry showed in the most junior member of his staff. Here again, it will be seen, he was fortunate, but like all the good fortune that attended him in his marvellous career, his own character and exceptional talents went far towards its attainment. There was no 'luck' about his success. From first to last it was earned and deserved. And it may be mentioned here that for a quarter of a century, 1909-34, after John Derry had retired from the editorship of the Sheffield Independent, which he assumed in 1895 (when the present writer succeeded him on the Nottingham Express), he was happy to collaborate with his former apprentice as staff contributor to the various publications which he was now producing with the ever-increasing approval of a world-wide reading public. Derry died in 1937 at the age of 83.

One other colleague of Arthur's during his 'prentice days was the late J. B. Firth, eminent for many years as the chief staff writer of the Daily Telegraph. Firth, who was assistant editor to Derry and also editor of the Evening News, had a very brilliant university career at Oxford, and was a writer of great charm, the three volumes on the shires of Derby, Nottingham, and Leicester, which he contributed to the Highways and Byways series, being models of literary topography. He left Nottingham in 1895 about the same time as Derry, and went to edit the Lancashire Daily Post at Preston until he joined the Daily Telegraph in 1897, continuing on its staff

ARTHUR'S 'OPEN SESAME!'

up to his death in 1943 at the age of 75. When Arthur celebrated his own jubilee as a journalist in 1941, the avalanche of congratulatory letters that descended upon him carried one from J. B. Firth, in which he wrote:

My dear Mee,

. . . Let me heartily congratulate you on the achievement itself and also on an article which I read with the deepest interest and admiration for the tone which you kept at such a high level from beginning to end. You are, as Pope says, 'blest with temper,' as well you may be with such a fine record to your credit. It seems very long, doesn't it, since the old days on the Express, with John Derry as chief? . . . Still, I always say that it was a first-rate place in which to learn the practice of Journalism. I suppose that not many who were there with us in the early Nineties are now alive. . . .

Yours v. sincerely,

J. B. FIRTH.

'Not many alive!' Alas, both the writer of the above and its recipient had been added to the many that were no more before another three years had passed.

But once again I am getting rather far ahead of my story and must return to the time which Firth was recalling nearly half-a-century later as years of fine experience for his junior colleague. Arthur's companion of those days, whose memories I have already drawn upon, which antedate my own by two or three years, tells me 'It was a hard but exhilarating life upon which the youthful Arthur had entered, a life governed by conditions such as, it is to be supposed, are now unknown in the newspaper offices of any considerable town. The reporting staff of the Express and Evening News was numerically weak in seniors, and the youngsters, fortunately for themselves, were put to work at once, reporting police courts, inquests, public meetings, and concerts, and writing, with widely differing degrees of competence, narrative articles on the thousand and one occurrences common to a city of a quarter of a

million inhabitants. An impartial observer would have declared the apprentices overworked in those days, but so pronounced was *esprit de corps* and friendly emulation among these neophytes, that, instead of cowering before tasks to which two or three men of the opposition paper were assigned, they delighted to match their rivals, at least in length of reports produced.

'Work for the juniors meant a seven-day week, for the evening paper as well as the morning issue had to be served by the one staff, and it was not exceptional for one or more of these youths, quitting home in the early morning, to be engaged, with intervals for meals taken, at the expense of the office, wherever they could be eaten, until the early hours of the following morning. On Sundays there were sermons, musical services, and, in their season, harvest festivals. The most punishing time was at Christmas, when the youngsters—and seniors, too, for the more important tasks—had to leave their own firesides to write glowing narratives of the manner in which the inmates of hospitals, workhouses, and other public institutions had spent the festive hours. And how those hard-pushed juniors anathematised such churches and chapels as clamoured for the attendance of a reporter at services, carol or other, in their hollied and chrysanthemumed edifices!

'Never did Arthur complain; never did he consider the hours unnatural, or the labour excessive. Industry was bred in him, and with industry, ambition to improve, and improve he consistently did. Nottingham was a big town to cover, and the districts beyond, whose round of events had to be chronicled in the absence of local correspondents, was extensive, and, in places, difficult of access. Yet the youngsters of both papers turned their lesser travels to profit, not from the urge of need, but from the boyish delight of enjoying an extra earned increment. Their method must seem grotesque to successors born into an age of motor-cars, electric trains, and electric trams.



ARTHUR
AT THIRTEEN

PLATE II



Mrs. Arthur (Amy) Mee and Miss Lena Frazer
(standing) in the garden at Court Road, Tulse Hill,
London, about 1899. Inset, Arthur Mee from a
portrait taken at Nottingham shortly before his
marriage.



'There was a smoking monster of a steam engine that, drawing a cheerless tram, tottered with showers of sparks and clang of brazen bell, up steep Derby Road, to Radford, Hyson Green, Basford, and Bulwell. On principle, as a salute to æsthetics, that horror was shunned by the profit-seeking young gentlemen. They walked, and, the office having allotted the tram fare, the fare, perspiringly earned afoot, underwent conversion. A twopenny fare, gained by walking, bought a Tyler's pork pie; a fourpenny fare, won by pedestrianism, added two of Bentley's delicious penny custards, while a sixpence so achieved entitled the thrifty athlete to crown his illicit repast with a pound of Blenheim Orange apples. Knowing their country as if it was mapped on their palms, the young economists could by-pass and short-cut many routes covered by tram or bus, and still arrive in time for the engagement, the richer in pocket for the unarmful exercise.

'There was then, as now, a finely equipped Public Library of which Arthur made use, and he could draw, at second hand, on the library of the Mechanics' Institute. As to the Mechanics, there existed an unwritten law in the Express office; the most favoured of the youngsters was allotted a membership ticket which cost an annual 2s. 6d. This entitled him, in addition to other privileges, to take tea in the refreshment room and also to introduce a friend. The holder of that ticket, on quitting the staff, handed it on to a successor whom he cherished. At this time the possessor of the passport always had Arthur—heir-apparent to the ticket—as his guest, and it was the crowning satisfaction of the day to ease the round of labour and to enter the refreshment room, with its delicious odour of coffee and cold boiled ham, to feast, to rest, and to read. Arthur's invariable meal was a chunk of pork pie, with new bread and butter, followed by cake, and a book taken from the adjacent shelves.

'It would be impossible to find a youth more charged with sweetness of nature and generosity of spirit than the Arthur of those

days. Willing slave that he was, he would undertake the engagements for which he was booked in the daily diary, but at a word he would somehow contrive to turn out something about a function that a colleague found it inconvenient to attend. He had an unstinted capacity in his unspoilt nature for hero-worship. Then, as in later years, he saw splendours of heart and mind in associates inferior to himself in respect of those attributes, and in his generous assiduity he would cheerfully discharge self-imposed duties seemingly wholly incompatible with his inclinations. There was one home to which he would go for a rare idle evening and, in the absence of his friends there, mind the house, the fire, and the twin babies. But while thus trebly committed, so long as the twins remained placable, if he was not reading, he was writing. Consciously or unconsciously he was planning his future in an orbit wider than any he or his youthful contemporaries had yet known.'

With this lively description of the days immediately preceding, I come to my first association with the brilliant young reporter who was the pride of the staff, for being free of all jealousies himself he could not be the source of any in his colleagues, all of whom had soon come to recognise in Arthur the apprentice a person of no ordinary accomplishments, even if they had still to wait for evidence of his extraordinary talents, and longer still for his touch of real genius to appear. My story will now grow entirely out of my own recollections and I shall be responsible for the facts set down as well as the appreciation of the character of him whom I have chosen to call Child of Wonder.

V

WHEN WE ARE ONE-AND-TWENTY

THE passing of the years affects each one of us in different measure. The smiling, happy, courteous young man with the tapering moustache, who was introduced to me as Arthur Mee of the reporting staff, when in June, 1895, I became editor of the Nottingham Daily Express, would have been the last person I should have suspected of bothering his head about the course of time. I was but four years on the hither side of twenty, while Arthur had just bid good-bye to the last of his teen years, and I have no recollection of being seriously concerned about the flight of time in those years of 'immortal youth.' Nor would I have guessed from the cheerful demeanour of this young reporter that he was giving serious thought to the near approach of his twenty-first birthday. But I do know from the most admissible evidence, furnished by himself some ten years later, that he was thus early beginning to count his years with some concern as to the best way in which he could make use of them. For when his twentieth had run its course, he looked upon the event not as an occasion for rejoicing or one to be lightheartedly let pass. This will appear when we have continued a few more pages with his story. Meanwhile, a word or two on the environment in which, for nearly four years past, he had been living, and which we both were now to share for something less than two years.

The less prosperous provincial daily papers fifty years ago offered to their editors and staffs excellent opportunities for such 'high thinking' as each individual was capable of, together with the plain-

est sort of living. Luxury was unknown to them, but as most of these employees were young and intent mainly on learning their craft, hoping to attain to better things elsewhere, the mean appearance of their surroundings gave a romantic touch to their life at a time when Bohemianism was still associated with the pursuit of the arts. Nottingham journalism for some years had taken on a glamour of romance by its identification with the Silchester of J. M. Barrie's *When a Man's Single* (1888). That a man of genius whose work was being acclaimed on both sides the Atlantic had here followed the craft was probably a source of inspiration to Arthur Mee when he signed on as apprentice to the Express, which had but recently absorbed another and much older daily paper. This old newspaper may have been an unconscionable time a-dying, but it had a long and honourable record of living and was far more literary in character than either of the others that gradually edged it out of existence. It was called the Journal, and its persistent adherence to the more literary side of journalism, in an age when 'push and go' was the new motto of industry and commerce, was the cause of its decline. Time has revenged it, however, for although the paper that swallowed it was known as the Express and Journal when Arthur Mee started his career, it has for some years now, under more enterprising management which greatly increased its influence and prosperity, chosen to be known as the Nottingham Journal, to avoid confusion with the ubiquitous national Daily Express. But that was a possibility as little present in the thoughts of either of us in 1895 as the prospect of living to see two world wars.

All who have read *When a Man's Single* and remember the description of the offices of the Silchester Mirror have a slightly exaggerated picture of the casual way in which the moribund Journal was produced. Fact touched with fancy and humour was Barrie's way of describing the Journal's staff. Penny, the foreman compositor, who practically determined the contents of each issue

according to the immediate resources of his printing staff, and laid down the law to Billy Kirker, its chief reporter, was a portrait mainly 'taken from life.' In 1895 the real Penny was running a little hotel in one of the suburbs, where I went to see him one day in quest of Barrieana. I was amused to find that he was the only one on the staff who had 'spotted' a future celebrity in the shy little Scot who came to the Journal office in 1883 to spend a year or so writing its leaders and numerous delightful contributions which nobody thought much of—except Penny. Wise old birds were those foremen compositors of an extinct school, but the living representative of Penny admitted to me that he had never read *When a Man's Single*, adding 'although I believe he's got me in it.' Some day when his hotel job was not taking up too much of his time he promised me he would read the book.

Billy Kirker, the chief reporter, was also a study from life. According to Barrie, Billy Kirker had no ill-will to his deadly rival on the opposition paper, as he explained with charming naïveté to Rob Angus. 'Oh, no,' said Kirker, 'we help each other. For instance, if Daddy Walsh, the Argus chief, is drunk, I help him, and if I am drunk, he helps me. I am going down to the "Frying Pan" to see him now.' Before going to the Frying Pan he borrowed five shillings from the new recruit from Thrums. The Frying Pan, it should be explained, was the fictitious name for a small public-house of very uninviting aspect, which in the 'nineties stood near the Express office, but was then frequented by a class to whom Barrie's was a closed book. The so-called 'Press House' was a tavern a few yards removed from the original Frying Pan, and there local reporters who had at least heard of Barrie would drink beer and probably fancy themselves notable characters, carrying down traditions of Billy Kirker and that bright Bohemian band. It is pretty certain that Arthur never set foot in it, even out of curiosity, nor would I imagine that he ever entered either of the two theatres,

unless it may have been on such an occasion as a visit of one of the Tearles' Shakespearean companies. He might have ventured into the Royal when Sarah Bernhardt came (for a *matinée*, I think) in 1895—my first sight of that historic and unforgettable woman.

This glimpse into the social history of the Nottingham press, even allowing for Barrie's picturesque touches, is a reminder of the temptations which existed for our young reporter. But against these he was four times fortified by the puritanical atmosphere of his boyhood, the religious bent of his mind, his dislike of all loose talk (which endured through life), his horror of drunkenness, of which Nottingham was nightly presenting him with examples at a time when the licensing laws were administered with astonishing laxity, and the superabundance of women employed in the lace trade resulted in scenes of female tipping seldom to be witnessed in any other town. There was another and less obvious reason for Arthur's immunity from the dangers of conviviality: he was attracted to the craft of the pen by no Bohemian call in his blood, he never showed any love for the companionship of the frivolous, he disliked 'dressing a part' and always looked with disapproval on those who let their hair grow long, or affected the sartorial eccentricities of the Latin Quarter. His own aim in dressing was ever to avoid notice: a reaction I suspect to that parental peculiarity already described. From the very start he was less drawn to journalism as a romantic sort of life than as a medium for the expression of his opinions on the things that most engaged his mind. As these were, for the main part, religious and scientific, he had small use even in his early years for the lighter side of literary life. In truth he never at any time could be described as a *littérateur* in the accepted meaning of that term, but few of his time could rival him when it came to *littéromanie*. Writing with him was a means to an end, and never was junior reporter more conscious of his responsibility, more serious in his vocation.

It was therefore from no abnormal shyness that he avoided rather than courted the company of his beer-drinking, pub-frequenting fellows of the local press, with whom in the discharge of his professional assignments and in the intimacy of the reporters' room, he could be very congenial. Far less was it from any feeling of superiority. From which it will be seen that the temptations of the town and the time were powerless to turn him aside from the path he had chosen or to modify in the least degree his serious cast of mind. It should also be noted here that with perhaps two exceptions the whole staff of the Express was noteworthy for their good conduct, their freedom from the failings which were then too often associated with the journalist.

No more than a month or two of Arthur's apprenticeship had still to run in the summer of 1895 when we first came together. It was a year of great political activity, his last days as a reporter were among his busiest. Lord Rosebery had the good fortune again to win the Derby (with Sir Visto), the less pleasing experience, as Prime Minister, of resigning on the defeat of his Government soon afterwards (June 21). Lord Salisbury assumed office as head of his third administration on July 2, Mr. Gladstone retired from political life the following day, Parliament was dissolved on the 8th, and the general election was fixed for July 30. Stirring days, these!

I had gone to Nottingham in time to take editorial control of the Express for the campaign which ended with the defeat of Liberalism and put the Tories into power for another ten years, to the dire disappointment of our brightest reporter who, some little time before this exciting period, had performed a feat which has been frequently and variously described. Sir William Harcourt, the leader of the Liberals in the Commons and a renowned orator, came down to the neighbouring town of Derby to make an important speech which every Nottingham Radical would be agog to read next morning. So parsimonious were the finances of the Express

under the management of a Welshman from Carnarvon, that it might literally have taken Billy Kirker's satirical description of the *Silchester Mirror's* policy as the slogan of the *Express*, 'Enterprise without outlay is the motto of this office.' For years no editor had been allowed a say in the expenditure of the office, and it was notorious that Nottingham Liberals in those days had often to buy the Tory paper to read adequate reports of Parliamentary debates and political speeches delivered in other towns. On this famous occasion the *Guardian* sent three or four competent reporters, the *Express* but one. That one was as good as any three or four, however, for he was Arthur Mee.

Single-handed he made a verbatim report of Harcourt's speech, hurried to the train with his note-book and writing-pad, transcribed what he could on his way to Nottingham, and having reached his office read out some portion of his notes to another reporter who was still on duty, then continued with his own transcript at top speed, so that he contrived before the hour of going to press to have the entire speech in type! Thanks to him, the *Express* could look the *Guardian* in the face for once on a big political occasion. To take a full shorthand note of a meeting or a conference is no great achievement, nor to re-dictate your notes to as many as half-a-dozen reporters and provide a full record of a whole day's proceedings for the sitting of the conference next morning; but to fill three or four columns of a daily paper with a great speech, which had to be completely written by hand, set up by linotype operators, then read over by the reporter, all within two or three hours, is an achievement which implies rare enthusiasm as well as skill. Had Arthur been content to summarise the speech, filling a column or so with it, he would have been doing his duty and the chief reporter under whose instructions he had been sent to that Derby meeting could not have complained. But he was never content merely to do his duty; his delight in his work always urged

him to further effort when his enthusiasm was aroused, and when enthusiasm is joined to ability wonders can be worked. And incidentally a penurious management could congratulate itself on saving 'the company' a miserable pound or so in expenditure! Arthur was being paid sixteen shillings a week when he performed that feat.

As Arthur during the first few months of my editorship was completing his apprenticeship on the Express reporting staff, on which his crowning effort had been that Harcourt speech, I saw but little of him, my own preoccupation with the leader-writing and the 'Letters to the Editor' at a time of such political excitement left me little opportunity for getting on friendly terms with any of the staff. But soon after the Liberal Party had failed to come up to Arthur's hopes at the polls (which reminds me of a story that must not be forgotten) Arthur, freed from that indenture of apprenticeship, came into closer relations with me personally by his appointment as editor of the Evening News. But first that story.

Some time before the collapse of the Rosebery Government there was a by-election at Lincoln and Arthur had been sent there to 'cover' it for the Express. In his enthusiasm for the return of the Liberal candidate he sent the most optimistic reports of his canvassing progress and of his speeches throughout the constituency. These he wrote with such gusto and confidence, under the heading 'Winning Lincoln,' that they attracted considerable attention in the Tory papers, even in London, and much amused comment in the East Midlands. Arthur had his first setback when the Tory did the winning at Lincoln, and passages from the young optimist's forecasts were derisively quoted far beyond the Nottingham area. On the declaration of the poll one eminent speaker remarked, 'We have been told by a Nottingham journalist that the Liberals were winning Lincoln. Gentlemen, Lincoln is lost to the Liberals.' This lesson in restraining one's enthusiasm when it comes to prophesying was not

lost on the optimist, but he was equal to the occasion; he contributed an article to the Express under the heading 'A Surprise at Lincoln,' following this up with a final one explaining 'How Lincoln was Lost.' His capacity for meeting whatever new situation arose was at all times characteristic, as I shall illustrate when we arrive at his great days of creative editing.

There has been more than a little misleading reference to Arthur's association with the Evening News. Since his death I have even read in an African newspaper that 'his genius was seen in the fact of his being made editor of the Nottingham Evening News at the age of twenty.' Genius had nothing whatever to do with it: ability and opportunity everything. That paper was then a four-page sheet compiled mainly from the contents of the Express by the simple and economical process of lifting all the matter in the eight-page morning paper which might still stand a further printing in the ha'penny first afternoon edition. To this was added the short telegrams sent out by the Associated Press day service, and brief local reports on events of the day sent in by the Express reporters and correspondents, later to be expanded for the next morning's Express. The News had no reporting staff of its own. An editorial staff of one sufficed for filling its columns. Sporting events and racing news supplied by the agencies were largely responsible for such circulation as it enjoyed. I have also read that as its editor Arthur had his first practice in airing his views on the political situation. But of this I am in some doubt, as I seem to remember that its slight editorial space was occupied by reprinting condensed versions of the Express leaders, using the type in which these, like all the other matter reprinted from the morning paper, had been first set up: a measure of economy closely scrutinised by the gentleman who held the purse-strings for 'the company.'

Thus, when Arthur Mee became 'an editor at twenty,' or more precisely early in his twenty-first year, he was taking on a job

for which his experience and his own ability fully qualified him, and he was probably receiving under two pounds a week, which was more than double his highest salary as reporter. The latter is an important fact, for there is no incentive which is so powerful to the man of ability in setting his mind towards a better condition of life than to be underpaid for the work he is doing. In Arthur's case, if his salary had been increased by 400 per cent. it would have made no difference to his resolve to stretch his wings just as soon as he had gained this editorial experience which had been offered to him by the comparatively recent departure of the Evening News editor for a better-paid post in Lancashire. But it was a great opportunity for Arthur, and greatly did he advantage himself of it, as I shall presently relate. I never think it wise, however, to lay too much stress on the youthfulness of editors today or yesterday, when I remember that Delane edited The Times at the age of twenty-two. Or that William Pitt was Prime Minister and Chancellor of the Exchequer in the twenty-fourth year of his age! As a matter of fact, Arthur made no outstanding success with the Evening News, and some of his displayed headings and titlings were not without crudities which, in his interest, I did not hesitate to point out to him, though it was none of my business to trouble about that paper. But before another year had run he had learnt every trick of sub-editing in which, as I have already said, he was to become a great expert. After all, there is something in the Carlylean maxim that genius 'means transcendent capacity of taking trouble, first of all.' This Arthur had and many other capacities besides, as we shall yet discover. No, there was nothing remarkable in his editing of the Evening News. He left it much as he found it, for within the first few months of his taking charge of its production his thoughts and energy were all bent upon far greater adventure. With all his fascinating qualities which gave such charm to his personality—his alert, receptive mind, his wonderment at the unfolding interest of

life—he was no mystic, no idle dreamer. He possessed a strong vein of practicality; his adaptability was ever evident. He always knew very well what he was about. I should hesitate to define his precosity as that of genius; rather was it a precosity of living, as the course of his years will show. His first editorship was no more than a means to an end: journalistically ‘one niche the higher,’ but there were so many higher niches of which he had a vision!

That editor’s room at the door of which Arthur had taken fright when he arrived with his first offering five years before the point of time which for the moment concerns us, and in which for some twenty months he and I were to play a modified version of ‘Box and Cox,’ was noteworthy for nothing but its general air of meanness in furnishing: interior decoration was a subject on which the management was discreetly dumb. It was a large apartment, and doubtless since our time it has, under more generous management, been made more in keeping with modern ideas of comfort, and the editorial presence. I have never set foot in it again since I left it just on fifty years ago, but I think that Arthur, whose family interest in Nottingham remained strong to the end, occasionally revisited it and kept in touch with old members of the staff.

In a spacious oriel window giving upon Parliament Street my editorial table, a large and useful if somewhat ancient item of furniture, was placed, and in the back part of the room stood another large table for the use of the Evening News editor. The general equipment of the room, so far as I remember it, was not vastly better than Barrie found at the office of the Journal, but it served its purpose even if it had no carpet on the floor. I am not sure if it had lino covering its bare boards, but there was a generous fireplace and lots of coal to burn, a few odd chairs, some wooden frames against the walls carrying files of the local papers and The Times, some sort of bookshelves with various tattered and out-of-date works of reference (reminding me of those at the office of the

Silchester Mirror to which you could refer with the certainty of discovering that the page you wanted would be missing!), and in the far corner on the floor sat no fewer than five Yost typewriters, each in its dusty metal case. These are important to my story of Arthur Mee, as they were to my own, which is another story already told. Among the newspaper files around the walls was a long series of the Nottingham Journal, which engaged me far more than any of the other files, as I traced therein the whole range of Barrie's journalism, a thing no member of the Express had ever thought worth doing—not even Arthur, to whom the literary life *per se* had not as yet, or even later on, the same immediacy of appeal as journalism.

The duties of the youthful editor of the Evening News brought him early each morning to his desk in that room and occupied him there until he had sent the last of the three or four editions of his paper to press about five in the afternoon. The editor of the Express, who had been up till two or three in the morning and had in consequence to sleep until lunch-time, would arrive some time in the afternoon to go through the daily pile of letters from that very considerable section of the public who (in those days especially) liked to write to editors on all sorts of public and private questions, signing themselves Pro Bono Publico, Verax, Disgusted, Father of Ten, according to fancy or fitness. These letters had all to be examined, such of them as one chose for publication to be closely sub-edited, often greatly cut down, before putting them in the printer's basket to be set in type. My main work started later in the evening, about 9 or 10 o'clock, when the political news of the day was available for comment. Thus every afternoon, when the work of my junior colleague was at its lightest, we met and colloqued to our hearts' content. At this distance of time one can recall nothing more than the general drift of these confabs, yet there are little points that stand out like sparks of fire in the misty memory of our daily

thought exchanges in that rather bleak room. In a negative way one can also recapture something.

Thus, while our discussions were without limit, frankness being observed on both sides, I can recall no conversation on religious questions, hardly any about the purely 'literary,' in which I was far more involved than in politics, though in this last I was so much in agreement with him that we had nothing to discuss. Travel offered us few exchanges, as he was bare of experience outside the orbit of his local countryside; but on any or every aspect of the journalistic life he was eager to hear and as eager to tell. His reading, I gathered, had been up till then of a very miscellaneous nature, and that chiefly in what I might call the realm of 'wonders': things that had really 'happened,' the evidences of man's ingenuity, the marvels of nature, astronomy, animal life in its wilder aspects, travellers' tales particularly relating to the vast territories of the earth won for England by her adventurous sons. And poetry above all: the English poets in whom he had his chief delight, not I should imagine in any deep or well-ordered study of these, but in an apiarian way, buzzing about like a bee gathering the sweetness his mind was later to use in the distilling of his thoughts. But long screeds of the standard poets were memorised and often recited, with an entire lack of oratorical grace, to emphasise some point he wished to make in the discussion. And I suspect that he had already encountered, if not in Cowley's own pages, then in some anthology, those lines which an old tailor passed on to Barrie as a boy in Kirriemuir—

*What can I do to be for ever known,
And make the age to come my own?*

When Rob Angus, the hero of *When a Man's Single*, secures an editorial post on a London daily, the editor says to him, 'You suit me very well, Angus. You have no lurking desire to write a book,

have you?' To which Rob replies, 'No, since I joined the Press that ambition seems to have gone from me.' Whether Arthur had any such ambition at twenty-one I know not, but I doubt it: he was so obsessed with journalism, he who was one day to write and compile more books than any journalist of his time. And here I recall Robertson Nicoll's saying to me that no really busy journalist had time to produce books which were anything more than his worthiest journalism. Which was the chief secret of Arthur's wonderful output in his maturer years.

I think it strange that in those hundreds of intimate talks which we had in that frowzy editorial room where we each pursued our separate tasks (and where I thought far more about books than about journalism) Arthur did not show me a remarkable essay he had written at his desk there and delivered as an address to the Literary Society of the Woodborough Road Baptist Chapel. Perhaps he regarded me as a bit of a cynic and did not choose to risk my criticism of his first autobiographical confession. My four years' seniority, and a readier inclination to frankness in criticism than he was in the habit of receiving from his Baptist brethren, may have led him to conceal it from me for no less than ten years. I have certainly no slight recollection of his mentioning it to me, despite the high probability that it was composed at his office desk when I was present. But I could appreciate his reticence. He was of so sensitive a nature in his youth that he would blush like a girl if one took a little lightheartedly something he had said or written in the exuberance of his idealism. This I soon found out, and made a point of taking his most visionary notions seriously, even when they might better have been blown upon. But he soon grew out of this too sensitive reaction to criticism and even learned to laugh at himself. I shall now dilate for a little on that essay which he had prepared for delivery on July 22, 1895, the day on which he entered upon his twenty-first year.

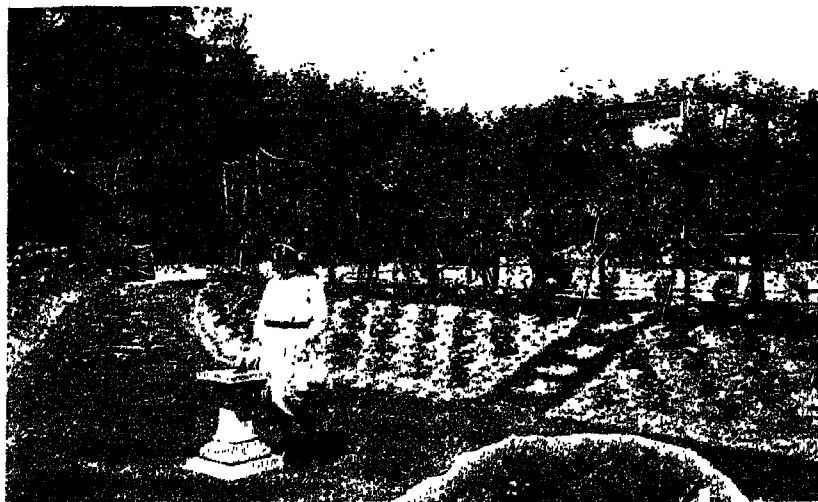
CHILD OF WONDER

In looking through the earlier dockets of his journalism—all as carefully preserved as the brilliant contributions of his later years—I have been impressed by the steadfastness with which he held to his principles throughout all his writings, from the days of his youth until his very last contribution to the *Children's Newspaper*. This sustained consistency of thought and utterance is not surprising in a writer who, from the beginning, was conscious of his 'mission' and wrote always as one inspired. In this respect he ought to be judged less from the strictly literary point of view and regarded rather from the ethical-emotional.

When in 1903 I started a little monthly journal called *Our Young Men*, among the contents of the first volume, which included many eminent contributors, I printed a remarkable article entitled 'Thoughts at Twenty-one: Impressions of Manhood's First Hour,' to which I attached this editorial note:

This article has a unique interest. It was written for a literary society by a well-known London journalist on his twenty-first birthday, and is here printed for the first time.—Ed.

The authorship was not further avowed except by the initials 'A. M.' at the end. It had been written ten years before and, as I should judge, for the Literary Society of the Woodborough Road Baptist Chapel, Nottingham. In any future selection of his writings it ought to have a place, for nothing could be chosen more completely in harmony with his later attitude of mind, allowing, of course, for his expanding awareness to the great problems of life. And in style, which with him was always notable for its freedom from any suggestion of the self-conscious, it remains typical of his manner through more than fifty succeeding years, if we admit a certain youthful exuberance which tamed somewhat with the passing of those years. A few excerpts from this testament of youth will be acceptable to the reader.



Arthur's first country home, Uplands, Hextable, Kent; Majorie in pensive mood outside entrance to 'The Little Garden of Happiness' at Uplands; Arthur's first motor-car (see p. 110).





Above, Arthur Mee, with Lord Northcliffe, Rt. Hon. A. J. Balfour, and Wilbur Wright (white collar and dark cap, third beyond tall figure of Balfour) at Wilbur Wright's first flight, Le Mans, Feb. 1909. Left, with Northcliffe, Orville Wright, King Alfonso XIII, and Catherine Wright at Pau.

Forty passengers, pilot, and Handley Page (fourth from right in second row) after record flight, November 15, 1918. Arthur at left of third row, Miss Lillie next, J. A. Hammerton third (see p. 196).



After a somewhat flowery exordium, in which he contemplates the twenty years that have gone and the 'long vista of the years to come,' he avers that 'No hope of triumph, no achievement of fame, can weigh down the sadness of the good-bye that we said yesterday as the day disappeared in the midnight.' 'Whose flag shall we unfurl? Whose trumpet call shall we obey?' he goes on to ask, on this first day of our twenty-first year, when we begin a new life; and he looks towards a civilisation advancing into righteousness, Christianity into Christlikeness, with the proviso that as we are the main-springs of human progress it all 'depends upon us each'—so that fifty years ahead he was anticipating Archbishop Lang's 'It all depends on me.'

We are none of us indispensable in God's programme, but abdication means cowardice. What would have happened to the world if twenty of its heroes had abdicated?—if Cromwell had never left Huntingdon?—if Luther had been a coward?—if Latimer and Ridley had trembled at the stake?—if the men of the *Mayflower* had never sailed from Plymouth? They were only one, each of these, such others as you and I; but they set their aim before them and established the victory. That is the text for today—the pressing duty of the first hour of manhood.

Already he was strong for the wider view of human responsibility, albeit he never wavered in his admiration for the British Empire to which in later years so much of his eloquence was devoted. This was not the viewpoint of many young men of twenty, half a century back:

We hold too narrow views of our responsibility. We limit our conception of duty by geographical boundaries. We gauge our relation to the human race by the distance in miles by which we are removed from our fellow-beings. We convince ourselves that we owe no duty to the Chinaman because he is so far away, while we acknowledge a brotherhood with the citizens of other foreign countries near our own. It is a strange enigma, this cramped, isolating view of brotherhood, but it runs through our moral code from beginning to end. We are moved to heart-

breaking by disaster at home such as we view with stoic calm when the afflicted are without our little world. We talk for a week of a fatality by our own doors, while we stand unmoved when dread calamity comes abroad. It is this narrow parochialism—this lack of cosmopolitanism—this falsest of false patriotisms—that cripples our life from youth to old age, and hinders us in the performance of duty. It gives us a mean conception of mankind that Christianity cannot recognise. It reduces the area of our knowledge and sympathy, which should be as large as the love of God.

And here we perceive how Arthur Mee was swept up in his youth into that movement which is only now dawning upon mankind after two world wars and the coming of the atom bomb: 'The true patriot is he who would knit the world together, not by the brute force of war, but by the common interests of humanity.'

The importance of the individual in world affairs and in human progress is brilliantly stressed by this young man of twenty in this eloquent fashion:

The greatest achievements of great men were all once one man's thought. The Forth bridge existed once in the imagination of one man. A dreamer, far back in distant oblivion, awakened from his dream, and the Pyramids threw their shadow on the ancient world. One man with a great ambition pictured the world at his feet, and ere he fell the nations trembled at his name. The mighty Mississippi was once a little rill that a child's hand could have stayed. The fearful avalanche, sweeping homesteads and cities to their doom, was once a flake of snow. If we knew what great events would spring some day, how we should pray over the little causes. That is one of the vital thoughts of today—the bane and the blessing of small things. No man ever plunged suddenly into great crime; the beginning was always small. Indifference heaped on lazy inaction, carelessness heaped on indifference, recklessness on carelessness, want of heart on want of thought—that is the history of human tragedy. The world would be sweeter, and heaven would be nearer, if we did not forget so often that mankind is moved and moulded less by great convulsions than by the patient living of good lives, and that the common events of this life, and not the great crises, fit us or unfit us for the life to come.

And finally, with our record of his life-work so completely available, we can understand that the young man he was addressing in these concluding passages of his paper to that Baptist Literary Society, nearly fifty years before he laid down his gifted pen for ever, was none other than Arthur Mee. An apt quotation from the modern poet (whose work he greatly disliked), 'My end is in my beginning,' sums up in half a dozen words a great truth to which Arthur's whole career bore witness. Read these words of Arthur Mee, written when he was twenty years and one day, and the full meaning of T. S. Eliot's words is immediately revealed:

And it is your proud heritage today, young man, as you stand on the verge of a new career, with the world before you, that you have a share in the building up of the new world. You are only one, but the world is a vast collection of ones, and it is astonishing how soon the little one with God on his side becomes a thousand. A small host of noble men has often become a great nation. And, depend upon it, it is a simple truth that you cannot exaggerate the power of a single man with a great purpose. Nothing is so contagious as real, thorough, honest Christianity. Let your resolve be to be right, and strong, and thorough in all that you do. Let the dominant purpose of your life be to make the world better for your living in it. Guided by that purpose, upheld by faith in eternal right, when at last your death-day comes you will look back on this birthday without a regret.

No man of his time more nobly did his best to strive for the ideals of his youth than Arthur Mee. And although at the end he was still far from seeing these being realised (for he died while the War was at the very zenith of its horror), he could look back to his twenty-first birthday without regret and on all his life-work with the joy of service in the cause of human progress.

VI

LONDON CALLING

THOSE five Yost typing machines, which I have pointed out lying dusty in the far corner of that bleak editorial room, were to prove of great importance to Arthur Mee—one of them at least—and also of some importance to myself. They had arrived there as the result of an economic idea that developed in the mind of the manager. Advertising patronage of the Express was never very plentiful fifty years ago, and the typewriter company, who were then pushing their most excellent product, arranged with the Express to supply five of its machines in return for an equivalent value in advertising space. A good idea, but so far as the paper itself was concerned, unfruitful. It had been hoped that members of the staff, especially the reporters, would take the little trouble necessary to learn how to use them, in order to replace handwritten copy with typed copy, which would have made for quicker composition in the linotype room, also reducing the percentage of error caused by handwritten copy. Not only might efficiency thus be heightened but some economy effected. None of the reporters bothered to change, however; they just kept on scrawling their copy as of old.

I should like to think that Arthur was the one exception to this rule, but I have no reason for saying so, except his keenness to adopt any new method that improved the quality of his work. I rather think that my own success in substituting the typewriter for the fountain pen or pencil was a spur to him. For some years I had been contributing regularly to the magazines and periodicals, and had to send my manuscripts to a typing agency to make them more pre-

sentable for the editors to whom they were submitted. But quickly developing far greater speed on one of these Yosts than in handwriting, I took one home, where I often knocked-off a part or even the whole of a column-length leader before coming into the office where another machine was ready on my desk to continue. My own impression is that Arthur then awakened to the use of the machine, and soon could rattle off as speedily as I an article on the one he selected. He had no need to use one in his sub-editing, which was now the main part of his office duty. But presently he was making such use of that typewriter as few journalists have ever equalled.

From the end of 1893, when I had written a day-to-day account of that very famous criminal trial known as the Ardlamont Murder, I had been an occasional contributor to *Tit Bits*, which published and starred an article of mine 'Describing a Great Criminal Trial' in its issue of December 30. This and other modest successes of mine as a contributor to the popular press were naturally matters of discussion with Arthur, who when he sat down at the editorial table of the *News* had done no contributing to the London papers, having so recently been released from his bond to work exclusively for the *Express*. But with the thrust forward into new territory he now made, thanks to that typewriter and possibly in some degree to my encouragement, he too would try his hand with *Tit Bits*. He tapped out an article on 'Fortunes Wasted Every Day' and sent it off. It appeared in the issue of June 13, 1896. The date indicates that this was written twelve months after we first came together in the editorial room at Nottingham, and two and a half years after I had become a *Tit Bits* contributor, which might seem to confirm my impression of how his arm was first jogged to try his luck in that quarter.

His theme was suggested by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his latest budget having revealed that something like a million of money was wasted every year in the shape of cigar and cigarette

ends, empty packets, string, and other rubbish thrown in the gutter. As Arthur put it: 'The Anti-Tobacco Society will relish this interesting bit of news, but staunch friends of the weed will hesitate a long while before accepting the Chancellor's figures as unimpeachable. . . .' Of course, properly examined, the Chancellor's statement was itself 'rubbish,' but it gave Arthur a good opening for an arresting article. He could have shown, however, how silly the statement was if he had been less intent as a non-smoker to illustrate the so-called waste resulting from the tobacco habit, and if he had happened to have visited Paris he would surely have described how the economical French had little receptacles on the lamp-posts for collecting cigarette ends which were sent to a factory where they were sorted out, cleaned and re-made into a cheap kind of cigarette to be sold for the benefit of the Paris hospitals. Years later, when his name had become familiar as a contributor to the religious and general press, he undertook an investigation of juvenile smoking on which he based a series of articles in the Sunday School Chronicle. These for many years were widely circulated in pamphlet form by the International Anti-Cigarette League, but there is little sign today of any consequent diminution in the popularity of the cigarette. Arthur's hope, however, was to minimise 'the Cigarette Peril of Youth,' as his pamphlet was entitled. One can only hope, and I am inclined to believe, that his anxious efforts to withhold the young from taking too soon to the cigarette may have been productive of some good.

Another article was turned out immediately after the first, and as readily accepted. Presently he was typing articles destined for *Tit Bits* or some other periodical of that class, at the rate of one a day. His excitement was understandable, since many a one of those contributions meant as much to him as his weekly pay-packet for his editorial work, and for some he would receive twice that amount. To go into the office every afternoon and listen to the tale of his latest acceptances was a real delight to me. He had struck a Bonanza!

Here was the highway to affluence. Our wonder-worker was in his element. His mind ran then on just the kind of topics which readers of the popular press were attracted to, and every hour of the day there were new ideas for articles jostling each other in his head. For the moment we must not enquire too closely as to how he was applying the ideals so forcefully set forth in that testament of youth to which the reader has been introduced in the preceding chapter. That was to come later and without stint, but for the present it was the voice of Mr. Aladdin of Tit Bits Cave he was listening to (Galloway Fraser in real life, an able and discriminating Scot). The journalist was at work, the idealist still there, but for the moment quiescent, until Arthur the journalist had attained to a position in which he could go ahead with that other Arthur Mee whom he was to build up in due time into a distinct personality that would merit and command the attention of serious-minded readers everywhere. Some years were still to pass before that ambition was realised, but it was there even in those exhilarating years of anonymous journalism.

How was so much accomplished in so short a time? For it took little more than a year to establish him as a successful journalist, after he got into his stride, 1896 being the vital year that set him on the high road. Not for a day after he became an editor did he look upon his job in Nottingham as anything more than a temporary adjunct for carrying out the work that was to take him to the Mecca of all ambitious journalists. London was calling, and he was out to show that he could answer to some purpose. The amount of editing necessary to produce that quite unimportant evening paper (as it then was) he could have done with his left hand, while he wrote scores of articles for the popular press with his right. And in truth he came not far short of such ambidexterity. Seated all through the day at his office desk, often taking a very frugal lunch there, brought from home just as the night-working linotypers

brought their evening meals, he could be seen hammering away at his typewriter composing a new article for London, stopping every now and then as another press telegram was brought to him to sub-edit for the printers, which he did in a jiffy, and then went on with his typing. I have no exact record of his editorial salary, but it certainly did not exceed £2 a week. The article he was typing might bring him double that! And I have no doubt that nine out of every ten articles he wrote were accepted straight away, the tenth having only to be offered elsewhere perhaps once or twice, so adroitly could he gauge the taste of the public.

Perhaps it would be more correct to say, so completely was his own mind attracted to the wonders of life, to the curious aspect of things familiar or strange, that he could hardly write an article on anything that awakened his own interest without awakening the same response in the mind of the great new reading public that had come into being through the Education Act of 1871. He was one with his readers, so to say, just as some twelve years later his gift of wonder made him one with his vast audience of juveniles—plus his idealism, a tremendous plus, be it added. For the present, however, we are considering him as the practical journalist. And when I tell you that the cheques he received after tapping out those articles of his day by day in the intervals of subbing the press telegrams often amounted to £15 in a week, and on one occasion totalled no less than £20 (which was 'real money' fifty years ago), you will understand how small a thing the Evening News had become in the economics of his life. Tit Bits paid one guinea per column for its contributions and ran a 'premium page' for which it paid two guineas per column. More than once Arthur filled all three columns of that page, and one of his articles would be the subject of the weekly poster, which meant an extra guinea. These were indeed 'flush times' for the late apprentice. That practicality which was so marked and so uncommon a trait of one whose nature was highly

charged with idealism was at his service in full strength in this twenty-first year of his life. Nor did it ever fail to assert itself when the need arose in later years. His power of adapting himself to any new set of circumstances was well-nigh incredible. Time and again he was to face problems which seemed insoluble, and solve them he did.

The first problem that presented itself was very easy of solution. When his London editor, that Mr. Aladdin aforesaid, realised that he had found a contributor so perfectly in tune with his publication that the articles accepted each week from him swamped all competitors—for it should be remembered that Arthur's offerings were in open competition with those of numerous other would-be contributors—that editor, in November 1896, deemed it high time to have him on his staff in London. A formal letter from Sir George Newnes, the founder of *Tit Bits*, proposed an interview at his headquarters with a view to such a possibility. At the same time there was also an invitation from the editor of *Answers*, that rival to *Tit Bits* which was the root whence sprang the great Harmsworth enterprises that were to mark a new epoch in journalism. Arthur had contributed to *Answers* and to many other periodicals of the 'bits' class, as well as to the first of them all, hence this other invitation from a London editor.

Well do I remember the occasion of this visit to London. He came in to see me for a final talk about his plans before setting out. This was the first time I had seen him 'dress the part,' just as Barrie had done when he went up from Nottingham twelve years before to make that historic call upon Frederick Greenwood, acquiring a new silk hat ('the Greenwood Hat' of which he wrote so humorously) for the occasion. In a new, neat-fitting rig-out of frock-coat and check trousers, with the top hat which was still *de rigueur* in Fleet Street, but soon to be outmoded there, Arthur looked much more pleasing to the eye than Barrie ever did, for slight as he was, in

figure he was well proportioned, and though short of stature he was taller than the great wee genius of 'Thrums'! They were both a little proud of their moustaches, as helping to make them look older than their years. 'I look so young' was an early Barrie essay, it may be remembered. And Arthur, who had the hirsute heritage of his father, while avoiding his beard encouraged the moustache. 'That's worth an extra £5 a week to me,' he said, caressing it after his return! It should be added that among the letters of recommendation which Arthur took with him to London was one from the manager of the Express, in which he said, 'Were we guided by selfish motives, we should hope that his application were unsuccessful, as his removal would be a serious loss to us.'

On his return he came in direct from the station to tell me with pardonable excitement all about his momentous experience. He had fixed up with the Newnes firm on very generous terms, the exact amount I do not remember, but it was well on the way to that thousand a year which, in a very few years, we both came to regard as a minimum! One unforgettable thing he said: 'In any case I am very glad those Harmsworths are not to get me.' For quite different reasons both of us entertained an irrational prejudice against the Harmsworths at that time, yet it was under the banner of that greatest journalist of them all, Alfred Harmsworth, that we were to be delighted to serve from 1905 to the end of our working days. Quite possibly a much better offer from the editor of Answers in 1896 might have altered the course of Arthur's life!

Events began to happen quickly after Arthur's return with the news that not only was he burning to go to London but the proof that London was ready and eager to welcome him. He had no difficulty in arranging for early release from his newspaper ties; which, as I have hinted, sat lightly on his not very broad shoulders. There was another member of the Express staff, just a year older than Arthur, quite competent to take over, in the person of Henry Leach,

but at that very time I was visiting him every day or two while he lay on a sick-bed in his Peel Street lodging looking so debilitated from lung trouble that I was afraid he might not recover in time to fit in with Arthur's departure. Quite possibly the news that he would have the editorship of the evening paper may have hastened his recovery, for he was soon well enough to take over from Arthur, whom he was fated to outlive by a year or so. After occupying for about twelve months the chair which Arthur had vacated, Leach went to London to join the staff of *the Evening News*, and soon made a name for himself as a writer on golf, a game which I do not think he had ever played when he was in Nottingham. So successful was he in this particular field that he won the admiration of Northcliffe because he was able to earn about £3,000 a year at it! So Northcliffe told me, but I had 'ma doots.' Leach's real distinction as a journalist was to contribute a brilliant essay every month for thirty years to Chambers's Journal entitled 'The Heart of Things,' which, every time I read it, I found more delightful than before. I never suspected him in our Nottingham days of such a genuine literary gift.

Arthur's 'precocity of living' to which I have alluded comes now to view. That wonder year of his life, on which he had moralised so earnestly to his circle of Baptist friends on the first day of it, was now 'one with Nineveh and Tyre,' and all things past, but behold him in London on the threshold of new adventure. How he would dramatise his first few weeks in the exciting days of becoming a London journalist, even though he was for the moment living as a 'paying guest' in a simple lodging on the Surrey side! But not for long would he endure the loneliness of lodgings. Despite the fact that he never had the least desire for conviviality, he was always at his happiest in the company of a friend or acquaintance. And this to an extraordinary degree, for he could scarcely bear to go anywhere without a friend; he would almost have done without a lunch if

there was nobodyⁿ to go with him. All his life he rejoiced in companionship, and those earliest days in London, when new friendships had still to be made and he was for the first time in his life knowing loneliness, resolved him to expedition in setting up a home, hoping to realize therewith the best kind of companionship. And once again fortune smiled upon him.

During a holiday at Skegness, which fell about the end of his 'prentice days, he made the acquaintance of a Yorkshire girl from East Cottingham whose charm of person went with a liveliness of manner and an endowment of common sense and practical domesticity, which all combined to make her his ideal of womanhood at a time when those qualities of character were less rare and more admired than they are today. Arthur knew that he had thus early found his mate, and in this, as in every action of his life, he was quickly resolved to make his romance reality. With the sudden opening of the gate that clearly disclosed the way to prosperity, towards which he bent his energy and his talents at so hot a pace—we might ascribe it to the romantic impulse—the joy of settling in London was vastly intensified by the knowledge that his lovely Amy was willing to face with him whatever fortune might have in store for them. Thus it was but a few months after going to London that he considered himself in a position to take the fateful step, and on March 6, 1897, they were married, Arthur being then in his twenty-second year and Amelia (Amy) Fratson in her nineteenth. Presently they set up house in a modest way at Tulse Hill, for Arthur had still to accumulate reserves of capital beyond the substantial salary he was receiving, additional sources of 'outside' income being naturally barred by the terms of his agreement. For a time all went swimmingly, however, and the opportunity of increased income and work of an even more congenial nature came to him under the same management, when he was appointed Acting Editor of a new weekly intended to promote the religious as well as the domestic

side of life, a well-known evangelist being the titular editor. It was called the Home Magazine, but it did not attain to anything like the material success of the other weeklies published by the same firm, and during the period Arthur continued with it he experienced something of the harassment which the editing of a periodical in its struggling days involves.

About the time of Arthur's marriage I had said good-bye to Nottingham and migrated to Birmingham, to become editor of the Birmingham Weekly Post, having my home at King's Heath, where the young couple came on a visit in the summer of 1898—a visit that was timed to fit in with an engagement Arthur had made to 'write-up' the Cadburys' pioneering work in industrial amelioration at Bournville. Recalling an amusing episode of that visit, I cannot refrain from a few words on one of the many aspects of Arthur's nature which at any later period of his life would have been equally in point, but which I first made note of on that occasion. As the Birmingham visit was to be a short one they brought a minimum of baggage, Arthur but one suit, the one he was wearing, a black frock-coat, pin-striped trousers, and shining silk top-hat! This, incredible as it must seem to the present generation, was the daily garb of London's professional men at the turn of the century.

On the day following his inspection of Bournville under the tutelage of Mr. Richard Cadbury, we planned an excursion on a picturesque stretch of the canal, near Yardley Wood, where as a rowing enthusiast I often went sculling amid scenes of sylvan beauty as charming as any to be found on the backwaters of the Thames. That glistening silk topper and his frock coat, which looked so well in Fleet Street, were hopelessly out of the picture in a rowing-boat on a canal; and as my wardrobe had contained nothing since I was a boy of fifteen small enough to clothe the dainty frame of the laughing young journalist who enjoyed the amusement he created by trying on some of my sporting jackets, the only thing for him

to do was to go forth in his frock-coat and substitute one of my tweed caps, a size or two beyond his need, for his silk hat! In after years he often recalled with delight the comic figure he presented to the ladies of the party and indeed to all who saw him on the way to the boating-place where we had a real country tea at a nearby cottage. Not for a moment, I am sure, did he feel embarrassed by his sartorial incongruity, and he plied his oar with as much freedom in his starched shirt and cuffs as any youth in his blazer would today. This capacity for laughing at oneself is one of the blessedest gifts man can inherit. While no man that I have ever known was more seriously possessed with a sense of his own usefulness in his particular sphere of activity, none was more ready than Arthur to see himself reflected as it were in a distorting glass and to laugh heartily at the spectacle he presented.

VII

IN THE STREET OF ADVENTURE

His withdrawal from periodical journalism led at once to his return for a time to the daily paper work in which he had been schooled, but with a difference. The London newspapers were, under the lead of the Daily Mail, becoming in part daily magazines, and as such were soon to smother many of the older and famous monthly and weekly periodicals like Good Words, The Sunday Magazine, Cassell's Saturday Journal, by printing a daily magazine page and publishing a serial story. It was a time of great change in British journalism, and only the newer type of monthly, such as the Strand, Pearson's, the Windsor, was able to withstand this form of competition by superior style of production and brilliance of contributions in short stories and strikingly original articles. Many of these, too, have long since disappeared, and those that survive have lost much of the character which made them favourites in their day. It was to the magazine page of a new daily paper that Arthur now transferred his energy and his improvisations.

A new London daily was then making a bid for fortune, which Fortune in the end did not accept. Oddly enough, its editor was one whose name was a mere extension of Arthur's by the addition of *ch*. Thomas Cox Meech had followed J. B. Firth in the editorship of the Lancashire Daily Post, and had now come to London to edit this new daily, the Morning Herald, of which Arthur was appointed magazine editor. It was an enterprise undertaken by a newspaper owner who too soon, in this effort to compete with the old-established London dailies, lost the fortune he had made in the provinces.

The result was, in a way, a return to the days of 'short commons' which had been only too familiar to Arthur in Nottingham, but he put in much excellent work on the *Morning Herald* while it lasted. He gave of his best, although he knew that here was no continuing success for him. In addition to producing a very attractive daily magazine page, he wrote many of the editorial notes and every Saturday contributed a long article on 'The Man of the Week,' admirably written and signed with his name, so that, as often happens in journalism, he made quite a reputation for his work on a paper that was doomed to failure. The new experience he gained was of great value to him in after years. His style as a writer had now matured at the age of twenty-four, for it altered little, if at all, in the vigour and vivacity which characterised it for the rest of his life.

Perhaps the most memorable of his colleagues on the paper was David Christie Murray, a novelist of remarkable power and in his day widely read; but a bit of a reprobate. I once had the pleasure of conveying to him a message from J. M. Barrie, with whom I had been discussing Murray's latest book. 'Tell him,' said Barrie, 'it is in my opinion the finest thing he has written, and one of the finest I have ever read.' This referred to *Despair's Last Journey* (1901), and, alas, the last of the many famous novels which Murray wrote, beginning with *A Life's Atonement* in 1880. He was one of the handsomest men I have known, 'a fine figure of a man.' His noble head of silver hair made him the ideal picture of a man of genius, even when he was reduced to the meanest shifts through reckless living. He came near to striking up a friendship with Arthur, who greatly admired his ability as a journalist. But that was suddenly thwarted when he revealed himself to the young hero-worshipper in his true character. One night Murray took the guileless teetotal editor of the magazine page to a well-known Fleet Street tavern which was new ground for him. While Arthur named a bottle of lemonade and some biscuits as his refreshment, the lusty giant of the

silver locks called for a large whisky, which diluted with a teaspoonful of water he tossed off at one breath, and called for more. This so horrified our total abstainer that the budding friendship was nipped at once to the loss of much enlightening conversation which would have enriched his mind. Murray's end was the typical toper's, and Arthur was among those of us who knew the man and deplored it when it came a few years later. His name signifies nothing to the present generation, which is avidly reading much fiction that is trash compared with almost any of the fifty novels that Murray wrote. Arthur never forgot that one episode nor its sequel, which furnished too intimate evidence to him of the perils of the bottle.

The office conditions of the *Morning Herald* were much worse than those I have described at Nottingham, so that during his rather trying time on this short-lived and long-forgotten London daily he had many reasons for regretting his break with the pleasanter life of the magazine world westward in the Strand, particularly as he had to be at his desk in St. Bride Street up to one o'clock each morning. But nothing could quench his eagerness for learning, his delight in new experience. On his train journey to Tulse Hill he was engrossed every night studying French, and as he had some distance to walk from the suburban station to his home, he pursued his study in a way that might have brought him under suspicion had he been observed by any officious policeman. It was certainly no common thing for the eye of the law to witness a slight, gentlemanly figure in frock-coat and top-hat pausing under the light of a street lamp for a few minutes, earnestly scanning an open book in his hand, then hurrying on to the next lamp, there to repeat his scrutiny of a page or two. Thus he was endeavouring to acquire a command of the French language by flashes of illumination from the street lights; he endeavoured to memorise while hastening from one lamp to the next what he had read at the last! French was the only foreign tongue he sought to master, and one may doubt if this unique

method of study went far to help him. He did, however, have a fair reading knowledge of elementary French, though no considerable fluency in the spoken tongue.

With the fading out of the Morning Herald its assistant editor had to secure some new employment quickly. His position in London was not yet 'made,' his name had been blazoned on many a page of the paper he had served so well, but a dying daily does not offer the best medium in which a journalist can make a name for himself. Happily he had not far to look for an opening. A friend was at hand to introduce him to a newspaper manager who had recently taken over the St. James's Gazette, the editor of which had noticed with approval Arthur's work in the Herald. A new and agreeable prospect of free-lancing now opened for him. The St. James's Gazette was one of the historic London papers: everybody knows its famous editor, Frederick Greenwood, was the first to publish Barrie's early work and to encourage him to come to London. The St. James's was now to be the medium of establishing another journalist from Nottingham before it lost its identity in the Evening Standard.

When Arthur was brought to its editor on the commendation of the manager as a bright young journalist open to contribute a daily column on all sorts of subjects under the firmament, he brought something new with him: an unerring eye to select the most interesting topics of the day and an unrivalled ability to write about them so engagingly that no reader would fail to be held. The editor supplied the title for this column, 'Obiter Scripta,' which would never have occurred to its writer, who seldom used a Latin phrase and instinctively seemed to avoid the Latin element in English. The secret of his quick success with 'Obiter Scripta,' which was as much talked about in London during the first three years of this century as the much-boosted effusions of our latter-day columnists, is worth explaining. I remember that once eminent journalist, Clement K.

Shorter, who so brilliantly edited the Illustrated London News, founded The Sketch, The Sphere, and The Tatler, in turn, and was the real leader in twentieth-century pictorial journalism, speaking to me in the highest praise of 'Obiter Scripta,' marvelling at the vast range of knowledge displayed by its writer.

Where did Arthur gather this knowledge? Just where George Augustus Sala and many another celebrated journalist got his: by the artful aid of a Commonplace Book. That was the principle of it, but Arthur's version of it was far from commonplace. In our Nottingham days I was already a collector of literary *ana*, but only in a small way a gatherer of general information. The idea of using envelopes to hold newspaper clippings and written notes, appropriately inscribed with a clue to their contents, came to me from De Witt Talmage, the sensational American preacher, who once confessed that was how he assembled material for his flaming sermons. Arthur had little use for the purely literary subjects, but unlimited need for every scrap of general information his daily examination of the press might yield. His collection begun in Nottingham eventually grew to such dimensions that a huge cabinet of many drawers had to be made to accommodate his hundreds of thousands of press cuttings, all neatly arranged in many thousands of specially designed envelopes! His ever-ready cabinet of information on every conceivable subject was insured for years at a thousand pounds, which was a gross undervaluation of its worth to him. With this, even in its earlier state, he could meet any demand made upon him as a freelance, and no wonder was it that he never failed to impress the readers of the St. James's Gazette with the universality of his knowledge, which newly acquired from his cabinet was imparted with an inborn grace of style that few of his contemporaries have brought to their paragraphs.

In October 1902, he started another daily column in the same paper exclusively given to gossip about celebrities of the day,

'people in the news.' The title for it was discussed with me (I had settled in London in the autumn of 1900 and was in almost daily contact with Arthur again) and after many a thought he decided upon 'Men and Women,' which I put forward because I happened at that moment to be looking at the front page of *The World*, the sub-title of which was 'A Journal for Men and Women.' These two columns, each about 850 words in length, he ran daily well into 1903, but that is only half the story of his amazing industry during the three years following his departure from the now defunct *Morning Herald*. I have been told, by the way, that his reward for his fine work on the *St. James's* (where money was nearly as 'tight' as it had been in Nottingham) amounted to four guineas a week for 'Obiter Scripta' and three for 'Men and Women,' truly Grub Street prices even when a guinea *was* a guinea. In another ten or twelve years, when the Sunday papers had attained to unprecedented circulation, columnists were being paid as high as £60 per week for less output than six days of 'Obiter Scripta' and the quality of the writing did not come up to Arthur's standard. But I never heard him complain of his small monetary return for that work, probably because he was enjoying it and feeling that the best reward was the attention his columns were attracting. That was soon to bear fruit abundantly.

But what about the other half of the tale of Arthur's work through those three years? In addition to writing his twelve columns a week, which had become the occupation of his evening hours, he was editing with more success than any of his immediate predecessors a well-known sixpenny illustrated weekly at a salary of £500 a year. This had been started in February 1891 with lavish expenditure, and high hopes of success, under the editorship of C. N. Williamson, but had passed through many vicissitudes before the same newspaper man who put Arthur on the *St. James's* induced him to try his hand at running *Black and White*, of which he also was manager.

Indeed, when Arthur lightheartedly stepped in where more cautious and less angelic journalists would have feared to tread, the editorship of that sixpenny weekly had become a byword in Fleet Street. It was said that would-be contributors used not to ask to see the editor but began by enquiring 'Who is editing Black and White this week?' Nothing daunted, Arthur laughed at these quips and set to work. And managed to hold the post for over two years; about as long as his only notable predecessor after Williamson, James Nicoll Dunn, had held it. Dunn, an able and gifted Scot, had been Henley's associate and successor on the National Observer, and left Black and White to edit The Morning Post (1897-1905), going on for five years to edit the Manchester Courier, which Sir Alfred Harmsworth had purchased to support A. J. Balfour in East Manchester, and thus came by his peerage although Balfour lost his seat!

Arthur was entirely sure of himself so far as the literary side of Black and White was concerned; but its main appeal was pictorial, and he had not the slightest experience in this kind of journalism—though he was later on to use pictures with consummate skill in his educational Part works and in his own personal books. But to the end of his days he never cared to understand the process of photographic reproduction whereby the image of an original painting, drawing, or photograph could be transferred with wonderful faithfulness to the printed page. His mind was repelled by those intricacies, he had not the patience to follow the process through its many stages; enough for him to say 'I want these pictures to be arranged thus, or so, to fill a page,' leaving the technical details to others. He very well knew the sort of pictorial effect he desired, but had no curiosity as to how it was obtained. Hence it happened often that what he asked for was impossible; but with experience he came to know what could be done from the results already achieved; how it was done remained one of the few wonders that he was disinclined to probe.

There was, of course, an art staff in being at Black and White, and they knew all that was necessary once he had decided on his subjects or accepted the offerings of the artists who called upon him. Most noteworthy among these, and least to Arthur's liking, was the finest of all British line draughtsmen, the great Phil May. Poor Phil, one of the kindest of Bohemians, was then showing patently in his features the effects of his too convivial habits, resembling, for all his genius and his earning capacity, one of the faces in the lower row of 'The Boy: What Will He Become?' F. H. Townsend, afterwards art editor of *Punch*, and his brother-in-law Fred Pegram, were other artists of distinction with whom Arthur had to deal in his new position, while Barry Pain, one of the pioneers of what was then called 'The New Humour,' supplied a regular article, or sketch, which was always a delight to read and brought its writer a beggarly two guineas each week. Through these swift-running years we met every day or two to lunch at one or other of the little restaurants which then abounded in Fleet Street, some upstairs, others down in areas, few of which were still existing when the Second World War came upon us, and one only that still goes on, an A.B.C. in Ludgate Hill. Our gastronomic wants were of the simplest, scarcely engaging our attention, for we met to talk rather than to eat. And in our talks what dreams took shape!

When we could spare the time, we together explored many of the Wren churches which studded the immediate neighbourhood with gems of historic beauty. My own favourite was St. Bartholomew's the Great, which took us back five hundred years before the birth of Wren and exhaled for me a spirit of time past that I did not find in any church of Wren's. I had visited it a dozen times and familiarised myself with its history, before I took Arthur there for his first visit. He had not yet made any sort of study of architecture. Saxon, Norman, Gothic, Perpendicular, Tudor, Baroque, meant nothing to him at that time. And I can see him now, standing by

Rahere's tomb, surveying the choir, his arms folded (a favourite attitude) as he looked up between the massy Norman pillars to the Tudor window let into the triforium for the abbot unseen to observe the offices of the day—'Oh, Sandy, if these walls could only speak!' 'But, Arthur,' I replied 'they *are* speaking, if only your ears could hear them. I know a good deal of what they are saying because I have learned something of architecture.' The Arthur who had never managed to distinguish between oak, and elm, and beech (perhaps because of an optical deficiency too long neglected) did in later years apply himself to the study of architecture (but never of botany) with surprising results, as all who have followed him in his King's England series of topographical books must know. It may well be that my remark that day in St. Bart's bore fruit, for I have noticed more than once in perusing some of those fine volumes of his, he uses the phrase about the speaking walls in a positive way.

I wish I could have told the story of his encounter with Alfred Austin, the little-liked Poet Laureate, over the typical fuss kicked up by him about a poem which Arthur had asked him to write for the Official Guide to the Coronation of Edward VII. Black and White was to issue this for the benefit of the London hospitals. Arthur has carefully preserved a bundle of letters and telegrams from Swinford Old Manor, Austin's stately home, as he evidently had some idea of writing one day about this absurd display of vanity and indecision, for the bundle has a note attached defining the occasion and saying 'This is what happened!' I must limit myself, however, to stating that Arthur's request was at first refused by Austin, saying 'I simply cannot write a poem, however short, save at the imperious bidding of some spontaneous impulse.' But somehow 'The Three Angels,' by the Poet Laureate, duly appeared in the Official Guide!

Five days, sometimes six, out of Arthur's week were being spent in Fleet Street editing Black and White, for which he usually wrote the leading article under the heading of 'Things That Matter,' and

six evenings at home he typed his two St. James's columns: enough to make the average journalist of today giddy to contemplate, especially if he is a member of the journalists' trade union! He had to type out his two columns *every night between dinner and the midnight post*, so that they would be received at the St. James's office by the first delivery, as they appeared in each edition of the paper. He never failed once! Not merely was he prompt with his copy, he was so sensible, so judicious in his statements and opinions that there was no need for the editor to scrutinise his work; it went straight to the printers without revision. Among all the hundreds of contributors I have employed in my time those of whom that might be said could be counted on the fingers of one hand. And withal he was happy in those days of unremitting toil. This because it was no sordid task-work to him. He loved to write; writing was a greater joy to him than reading; his recreation was to change from one writing task to another. And in the morning he would be heard singing in his bath, usually some refrain from one of Sankey's hymns!

Came the day when Arthur gave up the struggle to please a board of directors who were disinclined to leave well alone; he threw in his hand and Black and White resumed its old pre-eminence for editorial changes, but somehow managed to survive for another eight uneasy years before it was incorporated with The Sphere. Never after was it so lively, so worth reading as during the years that Arthur edited it. In addition to all the tale of work I have been recording, he had also produced four books, two of which were commissioned at my suggestion as editor of the publishing house that issued them—a position for which, by the way, in the brief interregnum between quitting the Morning Herald and taking on Black and White, he had been one of some hundreds of applicants, and according to the publishers my only competitor! Two of those early books of his were slight biographies, one Joseph Chamberlain: a Romance of Modern Politics, the other Lord Salisbury: The Record

Premiership of Modern Times. The third was King and Emperor: the Life History of Edward VII, produced for the Coronation reading market. The fourth was a well-conceived and cleverly arranged volume, issued by Grant Richards, the most enterprising young publisher of the opening century, England's Mission by England's Statesmen. The strong political bent of his mind is seen in the titles of these earliest books of his, the Chamberlain and Salisbury biographies being deftly written and displaying much ingenuity, which was essential in the hot Radical who was their author to interest the general reader without offending the partisan. Not for fourteen years was another book bearing Arthur's name to appear, but when he did take up the writing of individual books they flowed from his pen at the rate of two or three a year for the rest of his life!

One day in the room of the Whitefriars Club (to which he was elected on my nomination the next year), immediately opposite his own editorial office in Fleet Street, when we were discussing his plans for the future, he told me that he had come to the conclusion that the one place where both he and I should be working was for 'those Harmsworths,' as under the ægis of the great Alfred the opportunities for men with ideas appeared to be limitless. I had an idea for a new weekly and Arthur had one also, but he liked mine as well as his own, and since mine was merely an idea, he proposed that he should work out his own dummy incorporating some of my 'features' with his own and use the title I had suggested. Agreed; the title being the main part of my contribution. He had a magic touch at shaping the dummy of a proposed periodical, and made a lovely job of this one which, eventually, he was asked by Sir Alfred Harmsworth to submit to him at Carmelite House. The result was no surprise to me. Sir Alfred was only using the occasion to add to his staff a brilliant young journalist with whose work he was already acquainted, until he saw some opening for him in his vast organisation. And thus Arthur began at a thousand a year his fruitful—nay

historic—association with the Harmsworth enterprises which was to last until his latest day.

As might have been expected, nothing ever came of that proposed new weekly. Arthur had taken with him to Carmelite House his devoted secretary, Miss Margaret Lillie, whom he had luckily discovered at Black and White, and who continued to serve with him until shortly before the end, first as secretary and afterwards as associate editor. For months they were busy producing printed trial numbers of the new paper which Harmsworth christened *Talk*, a singularly unattractive title. Mine was *Who's Who This Week*, as the personal interest was to be its chief appeal. Then one day the editor of 'Page Four,' as the leader page of the *Daily Mail* was known in the office, although it was sometimes 6 or 8, resigned, and Arthur was switched over from *Talk* to take charge of that page. His new position was really that now known as Feature Editor, and called for ceaseless alacrity in securing topical articles by writers of note for display on the star page of the *Mail*. Arthur's immediate predecessor was one whose later eminence as war correspondent and as writer of a long array of novels of distinction has given him a foremost place among contemporary authors: Sir Philip Gibbs, K.B.E. His famous novel, *The Street of Adventure*, was the story of the last attempt in the grand style to found a great new London daily paper, the *Tribune*, of which he had been literary editor. The romantic name he gave to our highway of journalism still holds good, hence its use for this chapter of Arthur's early adventures in Fleet Street.

One need not enter into any detailed account of the time Arthur spent on the *Daily Mail*, as that would interest the journalist more than the general reader. Enough that it gave him great scope for exercising his inventiveness, and won the oft-repeated approval of 'the Chief,' as Sir Alfred was known to his many thousands of employees. What concerns us here is that early in 1905 the Chief, having discovered from the success which had attended his publication of

the Harmsworth Encyclopædia how vast a public there was for high-class works of educational value, suddenly decided that Arthur should produce an entirely new work in that class to follow on the Encyclopædia, which was the product of another firm, sold under the magic name of Harmsworth. It had been compiled over a period of seven years, under the editorship of George Sandeman, by a staff of University men in Edinburgh (that birthplace of British encyclopedias), and produced there in every detail by the firm of Nelson. Ten years later Sandeman was to initiate the present writer into the secrets of encyclopedia-making, when the time had come for the production of another and totally distinct work which began publishing in 1920 and met with even greater success than the first.

The new Part work that Arthur had been asked to create was the Harmsworth Self-Educator. In tackling this large emprise his energy and enthusiasm knew no bounds. He had also come to one of the important turning-points of his career.

Not all his self-imposed bondage to his desk could withhold Arthur from his one great hobby: home-making. In looking for the child in the man, I would venture a guess that he was fond of 'playing at houses' with his brothers and sisters when they were all very young. For he was always, in a way, playing at houses to the end. In Yorkshire he might have been dubbed 'house proud,' but I would more readily ascribe his joy in planning continual embellishments and improvements in his successive homes to the memory of his childhood in the congested quarters of an artisan's cottage; to his early dreams of what he would do when he had a house of his own. His first house in Tulse Hill was an attractive little dwelling with a small garden, where I remember spending an exciting evening with him setting off a great supply of fireworks he had accumulated for Guy Fawkes night. He was the only child there to be amused: no boy of half his years could have been more thrilled by the effects

obtained through putting matches to squibs, rockets, and set pieces than he was that night. His Tulse Hill house was just a starting-point in home-making, and after about five years he obtained possession in 1902 of a charming house in West Norwood (No. 18, Court Road, now Elmcourt Road, and converted into flats) with a high-walled garden, at the foot of which ran the apple orchard of Sir Hiram Maxim, the inventor of the machine gun: therefore no hero to his peace-loving neighbour.

This house of Arthur's was larger than his immediate needs, but in no degree beyond his design for living, as he had already begun the expansion of his library and his elaborate filing system. It was here he resided during those early years in Fleet Street we have been retracing. He spent as lavishly as his earnings justified—perhaps rather more than that, but he never doubted his ability to earn by his pen whatever was needed to meet his bills, and he certainly had justification in the event. In the lounge of the house there was a perfectly good fireplace which he had pulled out and replaced by one that Mrs. Mee considered, in her practical way, needlessly costly. I remember supporting her in this opinion, but when, in the summer of 1905, Arthur determined to move into the country, so that his little daughter Marjorie, born in 1901, 'might be brought up amongst the fairies' (as he wrote to the *Westminster Gazette* in an amusing letter which I shall mention further on), it was that very fireplace that found him a ready buyer for his West Norwood house! The glee with which he used to tell his friends of this happy chance left one in no doubt that he regarded any expense in the making of a home as a sound investment. But it is not every day, as I pointed out to him, that a man who is undecided about buying a house will be brought to a decision simply because his wife falls in love with a fireplace.

The new home that Arthur had found, in a lovely country setting where he hoped Marjorie would be likelier to have the fairies for

companionship than at the bottom of a garden abutting on the orchard of the man who invented those dreadful machine guns for killing people, was at Hextable, a mile and a half from Swanley, in Kent. Uplands by name, it was a pleasant-looking place of many rooms and had five acres of well-established gardens: croquet lawn, tennis lawn, rose lawns, conservatories, and a huge palm house. There was also a vinery, and a peach house where nectarines of luscious memory grew abundantly. There were large vegetable gardens; in short it was an establishment where one might have expected Arthur to settle down for life. Quite likely that was his intention, for he set about 'improving' the grounds and the building, the better to fit them into his own particular fancies. The great palm house was pulled down; its concrete circular path and water tank skilfully extended to form a charming little lake, where goldfish darted among the lilies and water hyacinths; a large aviary was built around the summer-house to accommodate some two hundred colourful British and exotic birds. The stabling for five horses was given over to Marjorie's Shetland pony Jack! He was a sturdy little fellow, not merely a pet, as for fifteen years or more he lived to pull mower and roller over widespreading lawns at Hextable and Marjorie's pony trap at Eynsford. Indoors the library was steadily growing, its chief competitor being Marjorie's playroom, where the biggest collection of toys I have ever seen outside of Hamley's was at her command, while she would usually be found playing with a well-worn gollywog, though her greatest joy was a sixpenny card of tools!

All this, of course, was not an immediate expression of the owner's ideas, but the cumulative result of his continual planning and experimenting during the years he remained at Uplands. He would tell you about receiving as much as 8s. 6d. a pound from Covent Garden buyers for his early May strawberries, and I can remember his reporting that the previous afternoon he had delivered to Covent

Garden no less than 540 pounds of tomatoes, a fruit which he himself found nauseating! The wonder was how all this could be done without impinging on his literary work which procured him the wherewithal to indulge those unremunerative fancies; but I suspect the tolerant good humour and the practical Yorkshire qualities of his very able helpmeet could explain that. Mrs. Mee and her sister Lena, the one in all domestic ways, the other as his 'Home Secretary,' were meticulous in carrying out his plans and projects.

As Arthur's life at Hextable went on very happily through the ten wonderful years that form our next chapter and some further episodes there will be worth recounting, I shall be content to relate two or three more at present.

One story in particular I must not omit, as it is amusing in itself, and revealing in its association with my subject. I had been invited to stay for a day or two soon after that 'little lake' had been completed and a gaily painted coracle had been launched upon it. The tiny craft was intended for the use of Marjorie, the pond having been made shallow enough to offer no danger to the little maid of four or five, as she now was—at most nothing worse than a wetting if she capsised, as she could have walked ashore. But on that visit at least, Marjorie showed no alacrity to take to this new pastime, so Arthur got into the coracle and circled round the pond to his own great satisfaction, expatiating on the health-giving merits of the sport. I never had the pleasure of seeing Marjorie afloat on that little lake, to the making of which Arthur had given so much earnest thought, but I believe it had a useful as well as an ornamental value while the Mees remained at Hextable, as the master of the house was often to be found paddling around it and imagining himself another R. L. S. on an inland voyage, or perhaps an Ancient Briton. He saw the funny side of making a pond for his daughter, and himself becoming its principal patron, just as I in after years used to twit him with the suggestion that fathers and mothers bought his Children's

Encyclopedia to read it themselves while pretending it was for their boys and girls.

Here is a good example of his enterprising spirit in those Hextable days. It pained him to have so much traffic with the local post office which his work called for, because it was located in a shop where beer and spirits were sold under an off licence. This he regarded as a slur on his village, one that he resolved to remove. So, purchasing a suitable plot of land, he built an attractive little post office, to which were attached a neat little tea-room and a circulating library. There was no difficulty about getting the postal business transferred to the more seemly premises he had provided, and over the front of the new building he had set up a sign-board carrying in large bronze letters the motto 'Do Right and Fear Not.' But, as often happened to him in these altruistic enterprises, the first tenants he selected to run the business proved not entirely to his liking, and then he be-thought himself of George Byford, who was living in London with his mother and two amiable sisters. He persuaded (his power of persuasion was considerable) the Byfords that Hextable post office, with its tea-room and library, was just the ideal outfit for them. A happy arrangement for all concerned, as Byford could travel to town about his educational affairs each day while the sisters ran the business at Hextable, so that the old schoolmaster and his pupil were now able to enjoy each other's company as near neighbours. This would be the only profit Arthur made out of his post-office planning, but it was well worth while, for Byford's influence on him, as I have already indicated, all went to the enriching of his mind and the strengthening of his own tolerant spirit. A man of much common sense, and less inclined than his pupil was at times to exhortation, he took down Arthur's slogan from the front of the post office, and substituted one of the best-known quotations from Bailey's 'Festus': 'We live in deeds, not years.' In this way he respected Arthur's penchant for monitory texts, and did not have to go

beyond Nottingham for a poet to supply one less peremptory than that which he displaced.

On my first visit to Uplands I was told how delightful it was to listen in the night to the song of the nightingales which abounded in the thick surrounding underwoods. I had never heard, to my knowledge, this most charming of bird songs, as I had always been a town dweller and had not yet taken to bird watching or listening for the nightingale's song, although I had read in one of John Burroughs' essays that it burst in the night like a rocket of melody against the dark sky. I also knew that I must have heard the nightingale's among the other unidentifiable bird songs in the daytime, as its singing was not entirely nocturnal. Arthur's friend Bryant was staying at Uplands that night, and as he was a student of bird life and a knowledgeable person on wild nature, we had some discussion on the local haunts of Philomel, I promising myself to lie awake into the small hours if need be to hear the singing. Bryant, a more frequent visitor to Hextable than I, alleged that he was suffering from insomnia and more often than any of the Uplands folk had the compensation of the nightingale's full song. I was well rewarded for lying awake at one in the morning, by hearing a sudden outburst of singing which sounded like a whole aviary of strong-throated canaries and which I instantly knew to be a concert of those sweet singers of the night. It followed some more distant intermittent snatches which made me keep alert when I was inclined to 'drop off.' And for more than half an hour I lay listening in a veritable ecstasy to this my first remembered introduction to the nightingale. At breakfast I was full of my experience, but here my tale of it was laughed at, scorned, by Arthur and the others, who thought I was joking! There was but one explanation of this: they were all asleep, even the sufferer from insomnia! But, O Arthur, the incredulous, 'still are thy voices pleasant, thy nightingales, awake!'

VIII

TEN WONDERFUL YEARS

DURING Arthur's period on the Daily Mail we were in such constant contact discussing ideas for Page Four and books that he wanted me to review (he had got the reviewing space greatly extended), that I had become a sort of outside adviser, receiving, at his suggestion, a regular fee for acting in that capacity. We could work so understandingly together that he urged me to think well of joining a concern that held out such unlimited possibilities for journalists with ideas. And one day he told me that the Chief would like to put a proposal before me for starting a new publication. What that was does not concern the present story, and it has been fully told elsewhere; but I succumbed. I was also to devote part of my time to co-operate with Arthur in planning and producing the Harmsworth Self-Educator. The financial arrangements were the same as those on which my introducer was himself working.

And so began our collaboration, which continued for seven years, but did not impede me from carrying out certain literary schemes of my own. Throughout it was a happy time, and the extent to which I shared it with Arthur Mee is among my pleasantest memories. On the day that the agreement was fixed up, he and I arrived late in the evening for dinner at my home in North London, where he was to spend two or three nights while we evolved the ground plan and framework for the Self-Educator. 'Why are you so late?' he was asked by the lady of the house. 'Because we have been so busy making Sandy's fortune,' he replied. And he spoke truer than he guessed. For his sanguine self, I have no

doubt he was already certain that his 'fortune' was as good as made.

What days and months of excitement ensued! Arthur's 'drive' was never seen at such high velocity again. The magnitude of the new publication as he outlined it was colossal. The expenditure that would have to be faced, the large editorial staff to be assembled, the multitude of outside contributors to be selected, to bring into being a fortnightly publication averaging 136 pages, each part containing over 100,000 words and hundreds of pictures and diagrams. All this, mark you, in five or six months, by contrast with the seven years which the Encyclopædia had been in the making—well, it would be futile to attempt a picture of the ensuing hurry-scurry, which only now in the film age could be made realistic on thousands of feet of celluloid. In the bright lexicon of Arthur there was no such word as 'impossible.' I should also have explained that on the day the first number was piled on the bookstalls we had to be going to press with the sixth to keep up with the printing and publishing.

What many doubtful souls thought impossible was accomplished largely by the sleepless energy of Arthur, although I had found it necessary to modify some of his ideas to make them more practical. Of a certain portion of the contents on which he set great store, I disapproved. For example, I thought that a Self-Educator was not the place to instruct a reader how to become a successful grocer or ironmonger, but Arthur was obsessed by the idea of completeness, omitting no branch of trade or profession. Anyhow, the way in which the public of 1906 removed the Educator from the bookstalls as quickly as a new pile appeared was even more remarkable than their appetite had been for the Encyclopædia. The name of Arthur Mee was now made familiar to millions on the huge posters which were used to advertise the work. And so began a new and wonderful career for the amazing young man from Nottingham.

When Lord Northcliffe (as Alfred Harmsworth had now become) expressed his gratification at the success that had crowned those few hectic months of intensive preparations and wondered how he could suitably reward the editor, Arthur had the wit to say that another thousand a year would not be resented. This, in view of the commercial value of the work done, was quite a modest request, which was readily granted.

Lord Northcliffe was a strong believer in the educative value of foreign travel. He lost no opportunity of advising his principal editors to take a six-weeks' holiday every year, but it seldom happened that any of them could free himself from his job for so many weeks at a time. It was at his urgency that Arthur set out for his first experience of distant travel in December 1905, when the success of the *Educator* was assured, and I could take care of its production in his absence, while carrying on my *London Magazine*. His sister Lois, twelve years his junior, who of all his brothers and sisters most resembled him in character and might have made her mark as a writer had she cared to devote herself to a literary career instead of domesticity, went with him as travelling companion. A common friend of ours, Duncan Cross of Cassells' editorial staff, also joined them for the Egyptian itinerary.

The voyage, and his travels in Egypt, were recorded by Arthur in a stream of letters to his family and friends, for wherever he went the habit of writing was so strong upon him that, no matter how tired from journeying or sight-seeing, he had still to write a letter to somebody. The educational side of the tour did not weigh heavily upon him; he was on vacation, happy in his release from editorial responsibility; his high spirits more than his intellectual reactions to the wonders of the Nile were chiefly reflected in these letters. Those that came to me, so far as I remember, for I have preserved but one, and those that our many other friends received, would all have been useless to me this day to weave into any orderly account of his

Egyptian journey. There in the land of the world's oldest civilisation, strewn with the most wonderful, and many of the most inhuman, monuments of man, Arthur had little to say. Why so? The one explanation that occurs to me is the fact that as yet he possessed no real background of ancient lore other than his Bible reading had established in his mind. His knowledge of the pre-Christian world was still very sketchy, episodic, considerable in quantity but not in co-ordination. And the things he saw in Egypt he saw as unrelated marvels of human skill and folly, without being able to comprehend them in any illuminating philosophy of history. That was soon to come to him, if never in full measure. Nor did he ever show any remarkable power of objectivity in the description of things seen. Had he possessed these qualities in any high degree, he would not have failed to exploit them. And that is why he wrote nothing at the time of this earliest and most exciting of his travel experiences. When he went to Athens at a later date the same lack was noticeable. The one thing that seemed to thrill him there was that he had stood on the *very spot* where St. Paul had said: 'Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious.'

Here is his only letter from Egypt which I have kept. It is dated from the Hotel Bristol, Cairo, January 6, 1906. I print it because it is very Arthurian in his mixture of sense and nonsense.

Dear Sandy,

The world goes round very well still, and grows in wonder and in interest. It would be absurd to try to suggest to you in a note like this anything of the magnificence of Egypt—of the way in which we come to live day by day in the world of Pharaoh and to scorn the age of *Educators*; of Luxor and Karnak and Thebes, which make us dumb; of Rameses the Great, upon whose face we gazed today; of the beauty of the Nile, its villages, its palm groves, its pilgrims off to Mecca, its quaint irrigation methods, its sunsets, its donkeys and camels and goats; of the 500 miles railway ride back to Cairo, and the way in which we were bundled out when our carriage began to blaze! a burning axle being discovered in time to save us from a fearful smash; of the Tombs of the Kings which

make everything else I have ever seen fail in wonder—of those and a thousand things. I can give you Egypt in 10-minute talks at Spiers & Ponds for the next four years.

I hope the sun is not scorching you. If Paris does not change me very much, you will not know me when I see the *Educator* again—not that I ever *want* to see it. 'Blot out its name, then; let it never come back to me.' Take it: keep it: do with it as you will.

Tell Friar X if you see him that Duncan and I are having rare times for our closing days in Cairo—we leave on Monday morning and this is Saturday night.

Egypt has done me, physically, mentally (and spiritually, I hope), a world of good. I am myself again, and when I come back (if you have not given my chair to Wood Smith whom I hear you have abducted), you can come and take your turn on the Nile. I am ready for big things—in the direction of burning all my Carmelite boats, selling Uplands, and bringing my human chattels to live for ever here. What poor slaves you humans are!

Toujours à vous.

A. M.

'Spiers & Ponds' was a restaurant in New Bridge Street which we frequented, known as the Central, but long since discontinued; X stands for Fred. J. Cross, managing editor of Cassells and father of Duncan Cross; Wood Smith was one of Cassells' editors whom I had engaged as my assistant on the London Magazine after Arthur set out for Egypt.

There was no reason for Luxor, Karnak, Thebes, to make him dumb, who was so vocal in admiration as a rule, other than that which I have ventured to formulate above. As the mummies of the Pharaohs were still on exhibition in the Cairo Museum at the time of his visit, it would be there that Arthur gazed upon the face of Rameses the Great.

On his homeward journey Miss Fratson and Miss Lillie met Arthur and his sister Lois in Paris and made a stay of eight or ten days there. Arthur was in buoyant spirits following upon a rough passage from Alexandria to Marseilles. I suspect that his allotted six weeks' vacation had somehow outrun its time limit, judging by the

CHILD OF WONDER

amusing and exuberant letter which I find I have kept. I don't know why I preserved it, but I am glad today that I did, as it is like listening once again to the gay nonsense he often talked when in the mood for fun. It bears the date of January 18, 1906:

Late of Colney Hatch:
now temporarily at

Hôtel de Lille et d'Albion,
Paris.

Dear Sandy,

I O U one or two letters of appreciation, congratulation, and other things; but at this moment I am kicking my heels so high with excitement over the fact that the angels of heaven have taken over the House of Commons again that I can write nothing, think nothing, talk nothing save that I want to come home and be an M.P. like all our fellow Friars and Fleet St. brethren. A truce to this, however, and a disappointment which I hope you will be able to bear with your well-known equanimity. I long to be at your side again, listening to your momentous classifications of humanity into the three classes of Stupid Fools, Blithering Idiots, and Cheap Contributors to the London. I long to dine with you and sup with you and keep you up with 'sad stories of the deaths of (Egyptian) kings' and glowing pictures of the graves whercin they laid 'em. I long to write you ten articles on Egypt for the London at £20 apiece and so cover nearly half my expenses in these latter days.

But the point of this is that, ardent as my longing is to see you, and to go down on my knees to you, my Rameses, my Isis, my Key of Life and my Sacred Bull, I cannot come back until Monday, January 29!!!!!! Forgive me. Pardonnez-moi. A mil marong. They are the only three languages I really understand, but I am willing to learn others to convey to you an adequate expression of my penitence. But the fact is that, after a voyage comprising 2 more dreadful days at sea, we reached Paris very late on Saturday night and have planned to stay until Wednesday or Thursday next week.

I am sorry in many ways that we are doing Paris now: it breaks the *nature* of my holiday, which ought never to have ended in such a civilised and modern world. But, being here, we are so happy a party, we so heartily enjoy getting lost, or caught in the rain in a city where there are no cabs for 4, or saying S'il vous plait to a waiter, that I have resolved to leave no sovereign unspent when I return to your country. I shall hope to look in upon you on the Friday of next week, but to confab with you in a friendly and personal and brotherly way rather than to receive your

TEN WONDERFUL YEARS

editorial admonitions and counsels, and, so far as business and other hateful matters are concerned, I hope, I pray, I beg, I plead that you will see these things through until Jan. 29 inclusive up to 12 o'clock. From that day I will release you for two weeks from all communication with the Self-Confuser and will write a glowing appreciation of 'Tony's Highland Tour' for the Literature section. So bend your iron will, and pity me. In your worst and heaviest moments your life cannot equal in sheer misery the moments in which I think that someday I must work again. Pity, pardon, and forgive.

And the God of pity be with you—as you need Him.

Toujours,

A. M.

For 'angels of heaven' you must read the Liberal Party, which had just been returned with a triumphant majority under the leadership of Campbell-Bannerman. The jocular reference to Tony's Highland Tour, a slight book of mine which had been published three or four years earlier, had little point, as the Course on Literature was entirely written by me, Arthur writing the more practical one on Journalism. It need scarcely be said that as soon as he got back to London he was at his job again with the least possible delay, all his amusing protestations to the contrary notwithstanding.

While the Self-Educator was still running its two years' course as a fortnightly, Arthur and I were busy on its successor, which was to prove in due time not merely as popular with the reading public but to outdo the Educator in circulation. It was in every way a finer work and put the Harmsworth educational publications in a position of unassailable pre-eminence. We had both been new to the making of such publications when the Educator was tackled, but when the Harmsworth History of the World came out in quick succession to the Educator, we had both learnt our job. The whole credit for the idea must go to Arthur, but here we figured as joint editors, for I was able to take a larger share in its production, having given up the editorship of the London Magazine, which had been my main job during the run of the Educator.

He had that not too common ability of knowing a good book by merely glancing through it. Looking into Helmolt's ponderous work in his library at Hextable one night the thought came to him that we should follow up the Self-Educator with a Harmsworth History of the World, using the English translation of Helmolt as the foundation and greatly expanding it by adding numerous important contributions from prominent English writers: archaeologists like Flinders Petrie, Dr. A. H. Sayce, Leonard King, H. R. Hall; scientists such as Ray Lankester, Alfred Russel Wallace, Prof. Sollas; and brilliant students of history, such as H. G. Wells, Frederic Harrison, and Dr. E. J. Dillon. We never forgot King and Hall arriving to discuss terms. These eminent Babylonian authorities came to Carmelite House, each armed with his attaché case, and together they talked of the money value of their proposed work for our history like a couple of tradesmen who might have been selling drainpipes instead of inestimable knowledge! But I think they were satisfied with their fees.

Together, Arthur Mee and I got out a dummy of this proposed 'great new work,' to which Northcliffe immediately gave his 'O.K.' The next thing to do was to secure from Heinemann the right to utilise his translation in the way we proposed, and also to illustrate it with an unprecedented number of pictures, Helmolt containing only a few unimportant illustrations.

After listening to the stories about the infallible judgement of those who have built up vast concerns, it is instructive to recall their nodding moments. Arthur Mee was again on holiday and in his absence I had prepared the entire first number of our History. When he came back we were dismayed one day on being informed that the Chief and Harold (Lord Rothermere) had suddenly 'got cold feet' about the History. Both of them were now doubtful whether there was a public that would be interested in history! Neither of them, in my belief, quite appreciated the attractiveness of a work that was at

once alive with human interest and the rarest and most fascinating scholarship, as it must be admitted that few English writers have rivalled, and none have excelled, the German group that wrote the original *Helmolt*. It is also a safe bet that neither of them ever read it, nor did any one of the directors of the Amalgamated Press. Added to the intrinsic merit of the matter that we were to present was the drawing power of a long list of eminent English writers, all chosen for their ability to be interesting as well as authoritative. Above all, there were to be 10,000 pictures, the choice and reproduction of which represented a large portion of my task.

All Arthur's enthusiasm was exerted in hammering these facts into the heads of our two chiefs, and he had need to hammer, for it was no more than the toss of a coin that eventually determined our going ahead. Every penny that was earned by this publication—and it would have represented the fortune of a lifetime to some of the leading London publishers—was due to the faith which Arthur Mee and I had in the certainty of its success.

Arthur had often been playfully described to me by the Chief as 'a narrow-minded little Nottingham Nonconformist.' But I never regarded him as narrow-minded, although he held fast to many Nonconformist prejudices of his youth. But in common with all who had taken even a superficial interest in the origin of the world and the evolution of mankind, Arthur even then looked upon Noah as a comparatively modern personage. One of his sweeping phrases for advertising the *History* was to be '10,000 pictures of 10,000 years,' which left Noah and the Ark somewhere about the middle of the period. Neither of us ever forgot the anxiety of Harold Harmsworth lest his firm, through us two adventurous editors, should do anything to cast doubt upon the date of the Deluge or the personality of Noah.

Reference to ten thousand pictures of ten thousand years reminds me of Arthur's aptitude for 'slogans.' He was a better publicity

hand than any especially engaged on that side of the organisation, and for those early Part publications he wrote some of the most attractive 'copy' prepared for the advertising campaign, on which as much as fifteen or twenty thousand pounds would be spent to float the new work. He would stay at home for a day and turn out a pamphlet of four or five thousand words which the Publicity Department would circulate in hundreds of thousands. He believed so completely in the new project, was so much more sincerely convinced of its merits than any advertising man could be, that his description of the work carried conviction with it. It rang true, simply because he honestly believed it himself. But he had a great affection for round figures, and the larger and rounder he could conceive them to be the better he liked the sound of them. He hoped and believed we should be able to find ten thousand pictures of ten thousand years, and if we could find well over nine thousand that would be enough to justify his optimism. I think I managed at least to come within sight of the number after hunting all over Europe to discover them.

One other anecdote apropos the History, which I have told before and here repeat because it touches an important event in the life of my friend. 'Before we had begun to publish the History, when we were together at Heinemann's in Bedford Street one day, Arthur suggested to him in a casual way that he was going to make about £20,000 for letting us use this old Helmolt stuff. Heinemann laughed incredulously, saying he would be mighty lucky if he touched £10,000. Quick as thought Arthur said, more in jest than earnest: "If you get more than £10,000 will you give me a motor-car?" "You bet I will. I'll be only too glad!" said Heinemann. We were little more than half-way through the publication of our series before a fine Martini car arrived at the door of Carmelite House one day, sent to Arthur by the delighted Heinemann, who had already received royalties that touched the £10,000 mark.'

TEN WONDERFUL YEARS

Once the history had set out with flying colours on its journey of more than two years through the fortnights, Arthur's thoughts were all bent on holiday. I had myself decided on an Italian tour that year and Arthur arranged to cover much the same ground. Off he went while I was to hold the editorial fort until he returned to relieve me. Some of his first impressions are conveyed in one of his customary joyously jesting letters which, unlike him, he had not dated:

Hotel Bristol, Florence.

Tuesday night.

My dear Sandy,

I hope you are not thinking me a callous wretch for not throwing a line of ink across the space that yawns between us. I want you to release me from the tyranny of a conscience which tells me every hour that I ought to write to you. I am finding this a wonderful holiday—more intellectually stimulating than Egypt or Greece or Littlehampton, but it is all too short.

I have already abandoned Naples, and I am dreading having to map out Rome for nine or ten days. Venice, a dream, a poem, a picture—what you will, was simple. It held me as, say, 'Guinevere' or Stevenson's Child Verses, or somebody's John the Baptist in the Louvre, or Versailles from the Bridge, held me, for a week. There is nothing anywhere else like this city which has never heard the tread of a horse's hoof, where there is no traffic save the traffic of people, no noise save human voices, and where men's hands have raised the most beautiful thing that I have ever seen—San Marco.

That was simple: you live in a square all the time. But Florence! every inch of it throbs with the tragedy or glory of Savonarola, the magic of Michael Angelo, the wonder of Giotto, the tenderness of Fra Angelico, the majesty of Brunelleschi, the terror of the Medici, the mystery of Dante, the interest of Galileo—need I go on? To come here one Friday and go away the next is an abominable and shameful thing to have to do, but it must be and it is. And to go on to Rome for 10 or 12 days is like an insult to the Human Mind and to the Genius of the Human Race. But it is, and it must be.

Forgive me, therefore, if nothing more than a postcard reaches you now and then, and remember: *I want no History*. Never do I want any History. Don't let me hear if the circulation goes up to 2,000,000. Let it

go. As for me, I am making the history of me among the men who made the history of us all, and I will have no ha'porths, be they ever so drunk with pictures, or ever so temptingly devised. I want nothing; the influence of pagan Rome is everywhere, and it bids me stay and pause in my wild career hitherto to settle down to the everlasting contemplation of this wondrous world.

As for you—Don't be stupid and play golf any more. If half the hours you have wasted by making ne'er-do-wells in the shape of caddies—is it because the man who makes a caddie is a cad?—were organised and decently put together they would be long enough to give you a holiday in Italy well worth the taking, and henceforth I adjust my esteem of you according to whether you prefer Florence or Wormwood Scrubbs golf links. Adieu, O labourer, worthy of your hire and of the devotion of

A. M.

In a letter from his chief, who had been at his villa near St. Raphael, Northcliffe congratulates him at the start of his Italian holiday. He tells him that when he gets back to his 'little top floor' (at Temple Chambers, where we removed to edit the History, as Carmelite House was becoming too congested) he must take a squint (from his window) at St. Paul's and begin to disentangle his 'long distant and confused impressions' when he would realise that 'Rome cannot be swallowed at a gulp.' It needed 'much steady drinking.' 'The whole thing is tremendous, almost too moving perhaps for nervous, impressionable folk like you and me.' He concludes with 'Much affectionate thought from my little wife and your devoted N.' A charming and thoughtful letter which indicates the very cordial relationship between Arthur and his chief.

In going through his correspondence I find that he was frequently putting up to the Chief, with whom his opinions had some weight at that time, suggestions for The Times and the Daily Mail. Some of these were not without effect. On August 22, 1908, Northcliffe replied to a letter from him in which he had urged that The Times should print an article asking the Germans to destroy their airships! His Chief advised him to read an article in the Westminster of the

night before which was written by J. A. Spender (in later years an intimate friend of Arthur's and a frequent visitor to Bynsford), who had it straight from Sir Edward Grey that the Germans were entirely mistrusted at the Foreign Office. He further advised him to go and spend a holiday in Germany and learn something about them at first hand, adding 'Our people have sang froid; the French, jealousy; the Spaniards, pride; the Americans, boastfulness; the Germans, envy and suspicion.' Arthur's reply is worth giving *in extenso*, as it exhibits the more serious side of his mind on world affairs and human conduct which was to find full expression from the War of 1914-18 in many different ways and largely to condition all that he himself wrote or edited for the remainder of his life:

27th August, 1908.

My dear Chief,

Many thanks for the copy of the Westminster. I quite agree with Mr. Spender's article, nor do I want the Germans to destroy their airships. But as a reasonable human being I do think it a great pity that the moment Zeppelin learns how to fly his genius should be turned to the uses of war instead of peace. If airships are of no use except to drop bombs from, I think they ought not to be invented, and it is a great pity that we have not sense enough to devise some other use for them. I have a little girl, and I am very anxious about the sort of world she is going to grow up in.

I will try to spend a holiday in Germany—if ever I get one! I hope you will do something to help to remove this stupid feeling in the two countries rather than insist upon it too much. You can do so much now to make all the difference one way or the other in five or ten years.

I am told that the German papers often say the most extraordinary things, and speak almost as if war had been declared with England; but *surely this cannot be so!* Would it not be worth while to get somebody to go to Germany to examine the files of twenty leading German papers for the past twelve months, and write an independent review of them from this standpoint? I think that ought to be done in *The Times*; and if the papers are saying these things such an article would have a very salutary effect.

It would be worth while to get the Berlin correspondent of *The*

TIMES to give a whole month to a two-column article, telling the truth once for all about this attitude of the German papers. It really is absurd that wars should be allowed to grow in these days out of misunderstandings, and certainly nobody wants war between England and Germany. If it comes it will be a war of suspicion, and it is much better to remove the cause for suspicion than to fight it out. Dr. Dillon told me that he had a letter the other day from a very important man in Berlin, who wrote of Germany's peaceful intentions and said that everybody there desired peace. Then this man went on to say, 'But your king—he is most warlike!' We, of course, can think of nothing more ridiculous than that, yet it is this sort of thing on both sides that may have such fearful issues.

But I did not mean to bother you with this. I would much rather write to you about my motor car! Heinemann has given me the handsomest cream motor car that you ever saw in your life, and if all my circulations go down you must blame Heinemann, because I cannot sit still at my desk for five minutes nowadays. I wish you would come for a ride with me.

Yours very sincerely,

A. M.

A new sort of life for Arthur and his family began with that car. And it was unfortunate, but strictly in character, that not long before he found himself a car-owner he had written a letter to the Westminster Gazette protesting against the dust of the cars, and the noise of their hooters, along the country lanes of Hextable, where he had come to dwell so that his little daughter might grow up with the fairies, as I have earlier recorded. What chance had those fairies of surviving in the mephitic atmosphere made by the exhausts of these invaders of the rural scene? But within a few months of acquiring that fine cream-enamelled Martini the same little daughter might have been seen standing up beside her father's chauffeur exclaiming in her childish treble 'Faster, Faster!' and before she was quite out of her teens she could drive a car as well as any chauffeur! Indeed, a time soon came when Marjorie was so expert at the wheel that her parents felt safer with her there than with anyone else. And following many years of work in the Girl Guides movement, which has made her widely known throughout that part of Kent where her

father's name had come to be regarded as a source of local honour, she established a fine record in the Second World War by three and a half years of service with a Y.M.C.A. mobile canteen, often driving at night among the falling bombs which made that rural area one of the least tranquil in Southern England. During the even more terrifying period of the V1's and V2's she continued driving daily to serve the crews manning six hundred of the huge balloons comprising the barrage in her region of Kent, which became one of London's outer defences against the flying bombs. In the parish of Eynsford alone there was from first to last the surprising total of 136 H.E. bombs exploded, 31 unexploded, 22 oil bombs, and 12 V1's, dropped, as well as thousands of small incendiaries showered during the ten fire attacks—a remarkable record for an area so small. And more remarkable still was the little damage all this attention from the Luftwaffe inflicted on the place. Arthur writes somewhere of having had to pass about a hundred nights in his shelter, and the aerial attack was maintained for fully a year after his death.

That splendid Martini, a commodious family car of the open touring type, was a powerful force in the amplifying of Arthur's experience, the widening of his interests; no mere instrument for joy riding. In taking him away from his desk to make better acquaintance with the English countryside and the historic places of our island, it—and a long succession of other cars that followed—helped to develop his love for his native land and in the germination of one of his finest literary ideas, although many years were to go by before he was able to give that form and substance in *The King's England*, his famous topographical series. And so it came about that if Marjorie lost her fairies Heinemann at least proved a good fairy to her fond father, who was now able to indulge many of the dreams of his youth, as the success of the *History* brought him another thousand a year, which his friend Harold Begbie celebrated in some witty verses entitled 'Three Thousand Pounds a Year.'

There was no resting on one's laurels in those days of soaring success, the great Harmsworth publishing machine which had been perfected for the 'Fortnightly Part' market had to be fed without any let-up so long as that market was good. And Arthur was busy evolving another one of those publications on entirely new lines, for which he had the necessary time, as more of my time could now be given to the History, though engaged on various literary projects which had none of the urgency of fortnightly issues. When he first disclosed to me the nature of the new and novel enterprise that was now possessing his mind, I must confess I was not very encouraging in my criticism. And it was to be the most important work of his life: the Children's Encyclopedia no less! I could not see the children of England clamouring at their parents' knees for anything with so forbidding a name, an opinion that was shared by most of those who were consulted by him in whose brain it originated. And I had a further objection when he unfolded his plan to me, that, strictly speaking, it would have none of the elements of an encyclopedia as I understood these. It was to be really a collection of books for children rather arbitrarily grouped within the compass of one continuous work. But he was so obsessed by the idea of providing for the young folk of his time a book which would bring to them all the essentials of useful, scientific, and practical knowledge, and also the endless entertainment that books could convey, that he would listen to nobody's criticism and held fast to his contention that any work which could cover an immense field of instruction and entertainment was truly encyclopedic and well within the meaning of the word, so why not be bold and call it by its proper name? An argument to which no one could take exception, save on the ground that the reading public had been made familiar with the rigid alphabetical arrangement for encyclopedias. In every way he was justified of his faith, and he had hit upon the master idea of his much-inventing mind. The whole story of the Children's

Encyclopedia I shall tell in our next chapter, as there is much more to occupy us before these ten wonderful years came to an end with the out-break of the First World War.

While the Children's Encyclopædia was still running serially Arthur tried out an idea which he assured me sprang from the Northcliffe brain, while the owner thereof assured me he wished Arthur to have all the credit. Nothing quite so ill-considered was ever offered to the public, and I have no doubt that its true origin was a 'lucky-bag' then having a temporary vogue in France, which Northcliffe picked up there on one of his motoring journeys. 'Why not adopt this as an idea for a monthly issue to be called "The Wonder Box," and when I say "box" I mean a box and not a bag?' he had said to Arthur, who talked to me about it at once, and in a few weeks of wasted ingenuity the first Wonder Box was in course of production. It consisted of a cardboard box about an inch deep and exactly the length and width of the Children's Encyclopædia. It contained perhaps a dozen items, toys, tiny booklets, instructive devices, such as a disc imprinted with the primary colours which when spun by means of string showed that all colour had disappeared, the disc seeming to have gone white. But, more important than any of these ingenious surprises, was a miniature eight-page periodical called *The Little Paper*. Whoever thought first about making *The Wonder Box*, nobody but Arthur Mee had thought of making a little newspaper for children to read, and he wrote or compiled it himself. If the production as a whole was rather futile, *The Little Paper* was a stroke of genius. It was the forerunner of *The Children's Newspaper*: the germ of a great idea. The practical difficulties in the production of *The Wonder Box* were overwhelming; for the first time Arthur had attempted the impossible. This was apparent to all who were connected with it after the initial number had been distributed, and these snags revealed themselves in all their nakedness. Two or three issues finished it, to the

great satisfaction of all concerned. But what a lucky strike was that little paper!

When No. 1 of *The Wonder Box* was ready Northcliffe was staying at Pau with a party of guests to be present at the first aeroplane flights in Europe by Wilbur and Orville Wright. Arthur was invited to join him and bring a sample of the Box: a fine experience for him, of which thirty years afterwards he wrote a brilliant description in *The Broken Dream of Wilbur Wright*, one of his series of *Rainbow Books* which I deal with at some length in a later chapter. I mention it here because the Chief gave me, soon after the event, a highly coloured account of Arthur's boyish delight in all the happenings at Pau and the interest his enthusiasm awakened in A. J. Balfour, among other notable persons there, brought together for several exciting days. 'By common consent,' said Northcliffe, 'he became known to the company as "*The Wonder Box*".' And as such he was more aptly christened than the cardboard container of the trifles he had brought with him—always excepting that little paper.

With the ending of the serial publication of *The Children's Encyclopædia* he established, as a 'follow on,' a unique monthly which after undergoing various changes of title finally became *My Magazine*. This gave him a fine outlet for his idealistic self. He continued to edit it for twenty-five years and utilised in 1921 much of the fine material it had contained to make a companion set of volumes, *The Children's Treasure House*; but that never had any noteworthy success, as one can well imagine, alongside its predecessor: there could be but one *Children's Encyclopædia*, which went from strength to strength, and is to this day in great demand.

Yet another fortnightly of which tremendous things were predicted was 'put into production' (as they now say of the films) under our joint editorship. *The World's Great Books* was to be its title, and these were to be presented in digest form. Arthur's love of

round figures led to our deciding on one thousand digests! It had to be produced against time, which involved the gathering of a great staff of literary assistants and contributors to condense, mainly in the actual words of the authors, the classic and standard works of all countries to such restricted dimensions that one thousand could be attractively illustrated and compressed within the confines of some fifty fortnightly Parts!

J. A. Manson, for many years chief editor of Cassells, and one of our assistant editors, was busy at the British Museum for months preparing trial lists of books; his successor at La Belle Sauvage, A. D. Innes, a distinguished Grecian, and our colleague on the History, did all the condensed versions of the Greek classics direct from the original texts, Sandeman rendering like service with the Latin, while a number of contemporary authors, among whom were H. G. Wells and Hilaire Belloc, 'potted' certain of their own books which we had chosen for inclusion. From this it will be seen it was a work of scholarship, no mere anthology of extracts, and it was presented in a very attractive style. Yet the vast reading public that had been found for its predecessors was shy of it, and as its average fortnightly circulation was not more than sixty thousand, whereas the others had sold in hundreds of thousands, it must be written down a failure. Northcliffe, after examining the first number, cabled from Newfoundland that it would score an even bigger success than the History! In America, on the other hand, it had great success and is still selling there more than thirty years after its first publication. It was a blow to Arthur's complacency, however, coming suddenly upon the extraordinary popularity of those other ventures. I have told the whole sad story elsewhere, and need not go over it all again, though I might add that fifteen years afterwards I re-used much of the original material in a seven-volume work, *Great Books in Outline*, which had a better fate. What I think worth doing here is to quote a few paragraphs from the introduction which Arthur wrote,

as they show how dithyrambic he could become when he let himself go, even if on this occasion his enthusiasm failed to communicate itself to the larger reading public.

A LIBRARY of great books is a procession of great men; it is as if Shakespeare, and Dante, and Milton, and Victor Hugo, and all the kings by right of mind came back to earth in every age to deliver to men the message by which they would be remembered. A library of great books is like a stately ship that sails along the seas of time, freighted with the emotions of the human race. All that men have felt and thought and uttered is there; all that men have seen and done and known is in that stately ship, passing out of the ocean of Time, down the river of years; yielding its precious store to all, yet never losing it. Out of the past, through the present, into the future it goes, leaving its cargo at every port, giving to all and losing nothing, yet growing richer as it moves, so that the ship that reaches the children of our children shall be beyond our dreams.

Yet there is no guide to the world of books. Literature is not a garden, but a forest; a huge, wild growth of trees, whose tops we cannot see. So must literature ever be, for literature is the hearts of men, the cries and hopes and yearnings of mankind, stamping themselves upon Eternity. And to ask for a map of literature is to ask for a map of the hearts of men and women from the time when men began to scratch upon stone. There can be no Ordnance Survey of literature. The genius of man, which can throw a cable across the seas and weigh the earth, can never arrange books so that we can find the thoughts in them as we find a street on a map.

There has been no work like this before; no attempt has ever been made before to reproduce in a single work the miniatures of a thousand great books. There have been books of extracts, histories, and criticisms. But *The World's Great Books* is none of these things, neither criticism, nor history, nor extract; it is a bold effort to reproduce the very book itself in little.

There are those in the world, we may be sure, who will charge this scheme with sacrilege; there are those who worship every word a great man writes. But greater than all words is the truth that words contain. It is better that the world should know the truth that thundered from Carlyle's desk, even if it come to him not in the full words of Carlyle

himself, than that he should not know Carlyle's philosophy at all. It is better that a man should know the principles of sociology even if he must learn them quickly and has never time to read Herbert Spencer's three big volumes. It is better that a man should know what Christianity is, even though he learn it from a pulpit and not from the Bible itself. And it is better, always better, that we should know the meaning of a book than that we should know nothing at all about it.

'Were all books reduced to their quintessence,' says Addison, 'many a bulky author would make his appearance in a penny pamphlet.' We turn to Montaigne, and we find him speaking of Cicero, whose 'premises, definitions, divisions, and terminologies consume the greater part of his works.' Whatever is quick and witty and pithy in Cicero, Montaigne finds to be 'surcharged with his long and far-fetched preambles,' and he bewails 'the time that a man who had so many thousands of things to say, spends to say so many, so long, so idle interlocutions and preparatives.' Not alone among the masters have these two writers anticipated some treatment of great books such as this work gives.

The World's Great Books comes in this busy age to open for the busy man the gates of the realms of gold, to bring to him books that speak. It comes to him from Plato and Aristotle and Thomas à Kempis, from Chaucer and Spenser and Milton, from Shakespeare, from the imperishable men of every time in every land. It comes to him like a stately ship laden with all that men have wrought that will endure for ever. It comes to him bringing his rightful heritage, the legacy left to men for ever by

*the kings of thought,
Who waged contention with their time's decay,
And of the past are all that cannot pass away.*

And yet one other point of interest which I am sure Arthur would have liked me to mention. The appearance of Great Books inspired E. V. Lucas and Charles Graves to one of their wittiest efforts in a shilling satire, wherein they made great fun of our joint responsibility for potting a whole library of standard authors. Arthur's favourite quotation from this was:

*'It can't be done,' said Hammerton.
'It must be done,' said Mee.*

My own favourite was:

*They tackled Mr. Henry James
Till tears stood in their ee,
'Look up the trains for Colney Hatch,'
Said Hammerton to Mee.*

Some forty pages of prose and rhyme scintillating with the happiest fancies celebrated our sad story and helped a little to stifle our lamentations. The astonishing thing about this good-humoured satire was the way in which its jocular authors contrived to represent the actualities of our collaboration. It will be noted that Arthur's letter to me from Paris three years before gave his address as 'late of Colney Hatch'!

With the conclusion of Great Books our years of collaboration had come to an end. During these I had many other interests which form no part of this story, and I had accepted an invitation from an American publisher which was to take me to South America for nearly two years. When I was about to take ship for Buenos Aires, Arthur was deep in the preparation of another serial work which I did not see until my return to London at the end of 1913, when it was well on its way to completion, Harmsworth Popular Science, an admirable, and I believe a successful way of presenting the latest discoveries of science and retracing the progress of scientific thought and invention from the days of Archimedes to those of Sir James Jeans and Lord Rutherford. I can say nothing in its praise one-half so good as to mention but one fact: Professor M. L. E. Oliphant, F.R.S., of atomic bomb fame, and now Professor of Physics at Birmingham University, has admitted that he got his first taste for science from Arthur Mee's publication. It, too, had a large circulation in the United States, and if it was not in the running with his *Educator* and our *History*, it was nevertheless a fine piece of work with which to

TEN WONDERFUL YEARS

have wound up those ten wonderful years when the First Great War called a halt to all ambitious planning and at the same time opened a new and brilliant period in the career of Arthur Mee, in which he was once again to show his power of facing an unexpected situation triumphantly.

IX

ROMANCE OF THE CHILDREN'S ENCYCLOPEDIA

ALL things conceived in sincerity and carried through with skill and devotion are proof against failure. Of such, when they have come to completion, it will often be said of their architect, in the Emersonian phrase, 'He builded better than he knew.' And on no creative work in the field of popular education during this century might that high praise more fittingly be bestowed than on Arthur Mee and his Children's Encyclopedia. One is glad to think that in his own lifetime he had the satisfaction of witnessing the world-wide response to his faith in an ideal which differed from so many ideals in the incontestable fact of its attainment. Herein, perhaps, we have evidence of that combination of the ideal and the practical in his character which I have previously mentioned. In saying that Arthur had builded better than he knew, I do not mean that he was himself surprised at the immediate outcome of his planning; that was merely (to him) the natural and to-be-expected result of his seeing eye, his ingenious mind, his practised hand. But in the sweeping success to which this particular work attained—not instantly, for it made a slightly hesitant start, gathering momentum as the reading public began to grasp its purpose—he found himself master of the event, possessed of an instrument of power which must have impressed him who was so impressionable with a sense of responsibility and destiny. There is no doubt of this. Nor is there any doubt that it did not fill his head with an undue sense of self-importance.

It is to be supposed, however, that on the first page of the first

Part of the C.E. he would not have so readily called it 'The Book of My Heart,' as he did on the last, when two years of rising enthusiasm had been lived through, and worked through, with wholehearted delight in bringing as near to perfection as was humanly possible a thing of dreams. It was in a way a poem—but not of 'airy nothings'—to which he had given a local habitation and a name. The wonder of it all was present in the mind that first conceived it, but it grew in wonder to him with each day that passed in the making of it, until he stood before the eight noble volumes it had grown into, admiring with joy the thing which the shy little, serious schoolboy from Stapleford, the reader's copy-holder, the sixteen-shillings-a-week reporter at Nottingham a dozen years ago, had brought into being! Here was something to swell the heart with pride of achievement, yet even when he wrote his final pages of the Children's Encyclopedia he was not fully aware of the great thing he had accomplished. His 'wonderful gift to the world's children' was still to be made available to them in many alien tongues which its maker himself could not decipher. From this it will be seen that I have here a tale to tell which would make a book in itself, but I must not be tempted unduly to linger upon it, though I shall endeavour to omit nothing of it that is likely to interest my readers old and young.

To designate the Children's Encyclopedia as the wonder book of the twentieth century in the history of book-publishing would be no exaggeration. Among the many thousands of books invented for the young it stands unique. Its central idea, the arrangement of its contents, its methods of exposition and illustration, have all been copied by hundreds of editors in every country where books are made, but the original production was the finest creation of Arthur Mee's inventive genius. It is beyond all computation the modern classic of the children's world: a quarry in which his numerous imitators have dug for ideas. And as it is almost forty years since it began publication and has been selling continuously ever since, despite two World

Wars that have but temporarily slowed down its diffusion—only to accelerate its sale thereafter—its life force would seem to be strong enough to withstand whatever shocks of circumstance are still in store for it. More likely will it have an even greater rôle to play in the uncertain years ahead as a really civilising influence on the younger generation now growing up in this bewildered world. Germany and Russia are the only two great countries in which it has not been translated, although in both politically tainted imitations have been published. The main thing to remember about the Children's Encyclopedia is that it is something far more than a book. It is a national—nay, an international—institution. It has been the greatest force in all the world for enlightening the children of the last two generations, and it will continue to exercise that function for some generations to come. This is not the language of hyperbole, but a demonstrable fact, as I shall hope to show.

But, first of all, a few facts about its fortunes as a serial publication. The first Fortnightly Part came out on March 17, 1908, and its immediate reception at the hands of the public was not at all breathtaking. Indeed, even its editor must have had a few moments of misgiving. For the usual course of these Part publications was to start off with an enormous demand, the booksellers clamouring for more, and reprint orders chasing each other to the printing works. After which came a diminuendo in sales, so that every thousand purchasers of Part One had dwindled to, say, six or seven hundred by Part 50. Lord Northcliffe, whose mind was at times, even in his greatest triumphs, inclined to think on death and dissolution, once said to me that out of an initial circulation of three or four hundred thousand there would be a large number of subscribers who would be dead before Part 50 appeared. But of course there was a still larger number who bought the earlier Parts in response to the intensive advertising and soon or later found they were not so keen to carry on, from want of time to keep up with the reading, or a dozen other reasons;

hence the decline. But this was entirely reversed in the case of the *Children's Encyclopedia*. It was a success from the start, but not a startling success immediately.

This may be gathered from the fact that his chief wrote to Arthur from France, a fortnight after the first Part had been on sale, to congratulate him on the success of the *Children's Book*, saying he preferred that title and thought it was a mistake to choose *Encyclopedia*! 'It will not be so great a pecuniary success as others have been, but it will give delight to hundreds of thousands, probably millions, of little people. And that fact ought to be a great joy to you as it is to me.' He was of opinion, however, that the decline in circulation would be less rapid than it had been in the preceding Part publications. In a month or two there was no longer the least doubt of the C.E.'s future. It increased with every new Part issued. Perhaps the word *Encyclopædia* had been for a week or two a deterrent, and when the fascinating nature of the work got talked about by its delighted young readers (the best sort of advertising, as all publishers know) new subscribers rolled in in their thousands and made it necessary to reprint the early Parts time and again to keep pace with the growing demand. Once again the faith that Arthur had in his idea was greatly justified. And I, who was one of those that did not approve of '*Encyclopædia*,' have often wondered if the whole marvellous story might not have been less exciting to tell today had so undistinguished a title as *Children's Book* been chosen.

The last Part, No. 50, appeared on February 1, 1910, but well before that date the Educational Book Company, a subsidiary of the Amalgamated Press, had begun an issue of the work in volume form and were selling the completed volumes by the thousand, with orders for the whole set of eight steadily mounting. Since that day the Educational Book Company have published no fewer than twenty-six large editions, the first twelve of which (1908-22) were in eight volumes, and the succeeding fourteen (1923-46) in ten

volumes. There was also a serial re-issue, which sold as freely as the first, and in this the work underwent many changes and improvements in presentation, being entirely re-set and in large measure re-illustrated, by making use of the latest methods of production, and bringing every section of the work up-to-date. The Company publishing it have, for over twenty years, sold few other works, so great is the annual sale of the C.E. that it keeps a large organisation fully occupied. I calculate that their total sales to date throughout the Empire in terms of volumes amount to 5,380,000, and this, considering that each volume is sold at an average price of about fifteen shillings, means 'business' beyond the dreams of most book-publishing firms in Britain. But in addition to these volume sales, some hundreds of thousands of complete sets would be bound by the subscribers to the two serial issues, amounting (at a guess, as no exact data are available) to probably another 1,500,000 volumes! And withal that is just a moderately satisfactory output compared with the results obtained by the American subscription house which has specialised in its sale for thirty-five years, concerning which I shall have some truly astounding figures to record presently.

I have mentioned in another chapter Arthur's insistence that all books containing statements of facts, dates, names of persons and places, should be fully indexed in order to make them useful as works of reference. His provisions in this respect for users of the *Children's Encyclopædia* were beyond anything attempted before or since for a work of its size. The Index first issued as part of the serial publication occupied nearly a hundred pages; but in subsequent volume editions it was greatly extended and headed, almost satirically, 'A Little Guide to Knowledge.' This 'little' guide ran to 352 royal octavo pages, each of which contained over 250 separate entries, many of these giving much increased detail. A little bit of multiplication will show that the Little Guide contained about 90,000 entries: a sizeable book in itself! No child who had learned to

read was to be denied instant access to any of the C.E.'s treasures for want of indicators!

There is little need to describe these treasures to the reader, as he or she is almost certain to be familiar with them. Only yesterday I met several persons whose ages ranged from twenty-five to fifty, and all confessed that they had been 'brought up' on the C.E. Beverley Nichols once told me that it was a birthday present to him from his father before his years had run into double figures, and it had the queerest effect upon him (this we shall take with a pinch of salt) of ridding him of a childish tendency to 'gulp,' so enchanted was he with its text and pictures that the gulping habit left him! Even if that were no more than an amusing story invented on the spur of the moment by one much given to humorous fancies, it was a happy way of suggesting the fascination of the C.E. for boy or girl. Nor need we labour the point of the relief its presence in the house was to bring to thousands of parents who now had access to all the answers for the questioning whys and whens, the whats and hows of their children. Soon they found their young folk telling them of many wonderful things which were entirely new to themselves. This, though a minor element in those eight or ten volumes of instructive and inspiring reading, was a major factor in its popularity. Its great secret, of course, was the absence of any writing down to the child mind. On this Arthur always prided himself, yet I must confess that in re-reading the very first page he wrote in it I now realise that it is the nearest he ever came to 'writing down.'

He sets out to tell boys and girls 'everywhere' how the idea was first born. 'A little maid' (none other than his daughter Marjorie, then seven years old) was wont to ask her mother so many of these whys and whens and whats, that Mrs. Mee, on one occasion when Arthur was present, exclaimed, 'Oh for a book that answered all these questions!' The father of the little maid was observed to be jotting down something in his note-book, but made no immediate

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comment. (He was jotting down 'an encyclopædia for children.') And thus the big idea was born! Then Arthur goes on to tell the boys and girls of Everywhere how it all came about:

Our little maid had friends in every flower and tree that grows, in every wind that blows; and at night, as the dark crept over the world, as the days began and ended, as weeks went by, and months rolled on, and years began to come, her little mind grew great with wonder, and she would find that behind the world and its play, behind all that she could see and hear and feel and know, was Something that she could not see and hear and feel and know. Something she could not understand.

And so there came into her mind the great wonder of the Earth. What does the world mean? And why am I here? Where are all the people who have been and gone? Where does the rose come from? Who holds the stars up there? What is it that seems to talk to me when the world is dark and still? So the questions would come, until the mother of our little maid was more puzzled than the little maid herself. And as the questions came, when the mother had thought and thought, and answered this and answered that until she could answer no more, she cried out for a book: 'Oh for a book that will answer all the questions!' And this is the book she cried for.

That is how our book began. Let us think we are sitting by the fire, little and big children everywhere (for children are we all), with storytellers and wise men to talk to us. Such a big book must have a big name, but the name is the biggest word in the book, and you will learn to say it easily and will know when you grow up that it is the only name that will really do.

Now I reprint these paragraphs not because I like them (I don't!), but because, of all the places to depart from his rule of writing for children as unaffectedly as he wrote for adults, he should have chosen the introduction to his magnum opus! For most readers I think will agree with me that this is an unreal description of the child's mind. And I will add that I have seldom met a more sensible, natural little girl than Marjorie Mee, whose father thus romanticised her in a mistaken effort to arrest the attention of the world's children! You turn the page and you find him addressing 'those who love children'

in his natural style, which was as intelligible to the children as to grown-up readers. Child that he was, on his own confession, he was in this most critical moment forgetting that fact, and just like a child playing at being grown-up he assumes a manner that was not his own! When we come to the end of the great book which he has carried through all its seven thousand pages and more without the slightest suspicion of 'writing down,' he is not surprisingly a little on the sentimental side in writing his 'good-bye to the book of my heart.' As witness his *Au revoir* to his little fellow travellers through the book whom he promised to keep friends with in his Magazine:

Have we not, in these years in which we have travelled through our lives together, been thinking the same thoughts, building up the same memories? It cannot be that you and I will forget these years, that the day will ever come when this book will be as nothing to you or to me. That cannot, cannot be. For we have learned together in this book the truth of Life. We have learned to count upon the things that matter. We know that the things that bind us in friendship are the things that last for ever. . . .

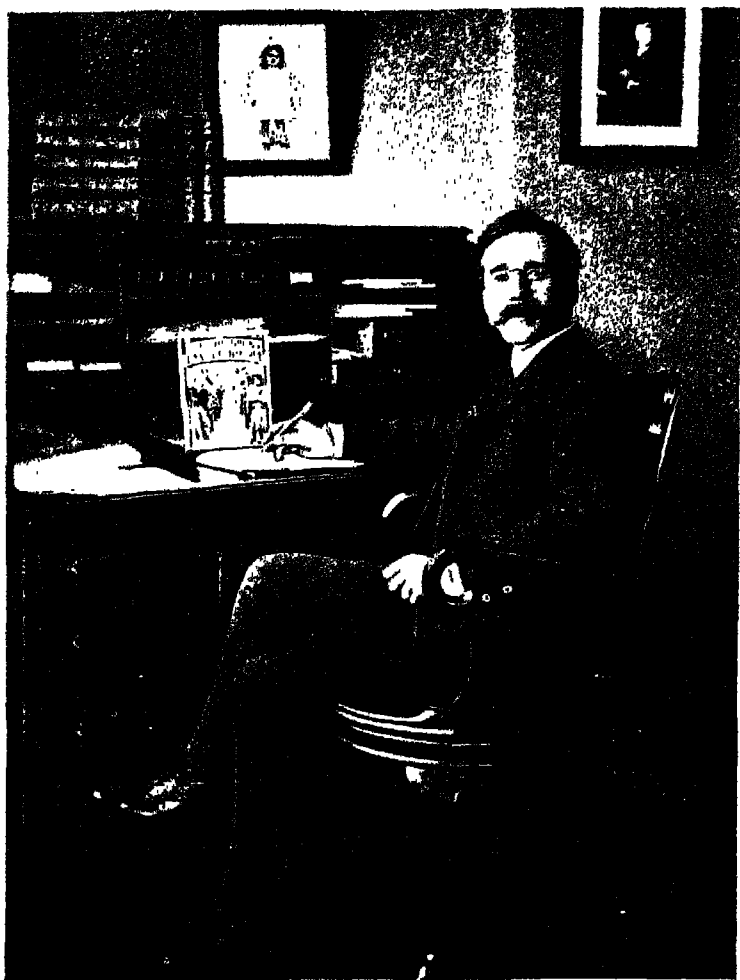
. . . And, if we think of it deeply, we know that this book can never really end at all. For a book is made out of the hearts of men and women, and grows into other hearts and other lives. A book carries through the world the things that do not die, the things that move us to good or to evil, that make or spoil our lives.

The Children's Encyclopædia may end in the form in which you hold this copy in your hand; the paper may perish, and all that the eye looks upon may cease to be. But what has been written from the heart in this book, and what has come into your own heart from this book, will go on.

The unique character of the C.E. had the endorsement of many of the leading men and women of the day who bore witness to its association of charm with instruction. Booklets in which most of these testimonials were reprinted were freely used in advertising the work. They were unanimous in their praise, almost monotonous, indeed, and I shall single out but two that seem to me to say something still worth remembering. Theodore Watts-Dunton, one of the greatest literary critics of the Victorian age, wrote: 'Such a publication

as yours would have been received with rapture by every intelligent child of my generation. I can conceive of no nobler exercise of one's intellectual powers than that in which you and your colleagues are engaged.' And Benjamin Kidd, the celebrated sociologist, told Arthur in a letter of appreciation which he greatly prized, 'You are likely to have more permanent effects on the education of the nation than many Acts of Parliament,' an opinion which time has endorsed.

To avoid the appearance of exaggeration in writing about the C.E. is difficult. No conventional phrases could sufficiently meet the need for superlatives in accounting for its world-wide success. In the field of juvenile education it is the paramount publication of the century. And here I would draw attention to a singular element in its success. Although its editor was well known for his strong Nonconformist principles, it had the endorsement of the leading Catholic churchmen. Cardinal Bourne, Father Bernard Vaughan, and the Archbishop of Liverpool, all gave it their blessing, and the Catholic Truth Society, through its secretary, Mr. James Britten, after careful scrutiny, agreed that 'it might safely be added to a school reference library.' That such was possible is a testimony both to the tolerant spirit of its editor and the good sense of these Catholic leaders. Here is what Father Vaughan wrote to the Amalgamated Press: 'The Children's Encyclopædia is a work calculated to arrest, instruct and interest any reader, whether child or grown-up. It is going to fulfil its mission efficiently and thoroughly. Your enterprising Firm may well be congratulated on placing upon the book-market a set of volumes which will enrich as well as adorn any library holding it.' Arthur had the skill and the acumen to avoid all appearance of denominationalism in a work which was designed for the instruction of the children of all creeds in the natural sciences, while reserving the expression of his own life-long Protestantism for his personal books.

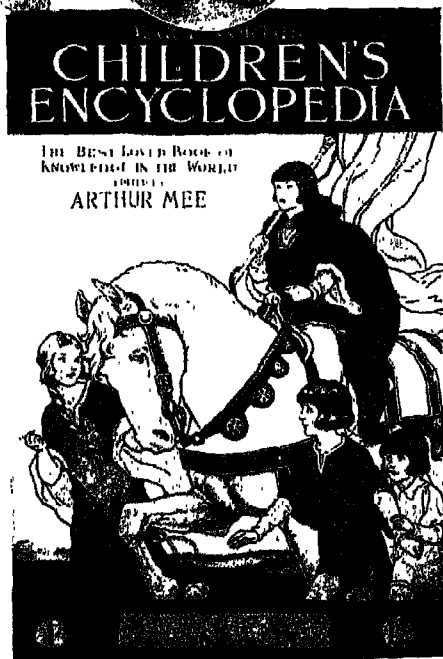


*Yours affectionate friend
Arthur Mee.*

Arthur Mee, at his desk in Temple Chambers, London, while editing the first edition of the Children's Encyclopædia. The current number stands in front of him, the first seven bound volumes on top of desk. The portraits on the wall are those of Marjorie and Lord Northcliffe.



Photo-montage of Marjorie as she was by the time the Children's Encyclopædia had been completed and continued as a monthly magazine. The name of the magazine underwent a number of changes until it finally became My Magazine. Marjorie, inset, at the age when her *Whys? and Whats? and Wheus?* inspired the C.E. Right, wrapper design of the enlarged and improved serial issue (1922-25), when the diphthong æ was discontinued in favour of Encyclopædia.



ROMANCE OF THE CHILDREN'S ENCYCLOPEDIA

Walter M. Jackson, an astute American publisher who with Horace Hooper had made book history in England at the turn of the century by exploiting the *Encyclopædia Britannica* on novel lines of salesmanship, and was now carrying on a publishing house of his own in New York, was quick to see the possibilities that would open for the *Children's Encyclopædia* in the vastly greater field of the U.S.A., and before it had run its course serially he had secured Lord Northcliffe's consent to producing an American edition through his own publishing firm known as the Grolier Society. As I happened to be the only member of the Northcliffe staff with any practical knowledge of book production and international copyrights, and had also had a hand in the making of the C.E., the job of fixing up this very complicated negotiation was left to me. The complication was due to the fact that American copyright had not been secured by simultaneous production in U.S.A., or by setting up the text of the work in America within three months of the London printing. The reason why neither of these precautions had been taken was that Part publications were unknown in America or had been complete failures when attempted. This happened with the *Self-Educator*. And meanwhile Yankee pirates were busy not only in imitating the idea of the C.E. in books, but in stealing such of its contents as they particularly fancied! In no wise daunted, Jackson went ahead and decided to import plates of the English edition intercalated with new material more in keeping with the taste of his countrymen. There were, as it happened, many American copyright pieces, especially in the poetry section, and many more were introduced, so that it was possible to print an impressive list of American publishers whose copyrights were included (all duly paid for, of course) at the beginning of the first volume of the set, and this helped to frighten certain Chicago pirates who were planning to steal the whole production! In this way Jackson outwitted the rogues (a steadily decreasing number) who batten on the laxity of the

American copyright laws in respect to books of European origin. As soon as the C.E. had run its serial course Jackson had the whole set of volumes ready for selling on subscription in the U.S.A.; the foundation-stone of his fortune as an independent publisher was well and truly founded! In some ways the story of Arthur's book of his heart in America is a romance of publishing even more astonishing than its English story, at least so far as we have yet followed that.

Thanks to some very ingenious methods of advertising the American edition, it was a best-seller from the word Go. That was in 1910, and it is still a best-seller in 1946. Impressive as the sales of the English editions have been, they shrink before the American sales! So vast an enterprise did Jackson's business become, selling little else than the Children's Encyclopædia which he had re-named The Book of Knowledge, using its English name as a sub-title, that he had branch offices in all the chief American cities exclusively given to the sale of this one set of books. So long as twenty-five years ago he had three separate printing and binding plants in widely separated centres employed all the year round doing nothing else but producing the Book of Knowledge! I have on my desk one of the latest Grolier folders (a finer piece of propaganda than any ever issued for the English edition), in which it is claimed that more than 3,500,000 SETS of the Book of Knowledge have been sold since that lucky day thirty-five years ago when Jackson staked his fortune on its first edition. The earlier editions were limited to either ten or fifteen volumes, but for many years now the work has consisted of twenty volumes owing to the augmentation of its contents and its continuous revision, a permanent editorial staff being maintained exclusively for that purpose. If we take fifteen volumes as the average for each of these sets, the total number of volumes reaches the astronomical figure of 52,500,000, which is probably an underestimate. The total money value of these would actually exceed their equivalent in pounds sterling!

Verily the mustard seed of Arthur's planting has grown. And where in all this wondrous wealth did the planter come in? I remember his writing somewhere, 'I could have been a millionaire.' Of course he could, if he had aimed at nothing more distinguished than that, but he aimed at being Arthur Mee and the Arthur Mee he became was much too engrossed in realising himself to have time, if he had the inclination, to become a millionaire. Ergo, he could not have been a millionaire and remained Arthur Mee, child of wonder! But he helped men on both sides of the Atlantic to become millionaires, and for himself he did have some modest return for his ideas and his industry, infinitesimal though it was by contrast with the immense turnover of pounds and dollars. Far more than mere money to him was the knowledge (taking America alone) that his greatest editorial creation had for many years, as it is at this day, given employment to thousands of men, women, and youths in the making and selling of it, and incalculable pleasure and instruction to millions of children (of all ages), in the reading of it. No, Arthur, you were not meant to be a millionaire in pounds or even dollars, but in the hearts and admiration of children Everywhere, and that you had beyond any millionaire I can readily call to mind.

Here is a good untold story of how Arthur's name became famous in the United States. When I was co-operating with Jackson in preparing the first American edition of the C.E., he asked me if its editor had any university degrees, or had received an honorary doctorate, as the American public 'rather set store on those things.' I explained that if he had had a university training I thought there would have been no Children's Encyclopedia, which called for imagination, inventive genius, and a common feeling with the natural curiosity of children, none of these things being products of universities. As for honorary degrees, one knew how freely these were distributed in America and how frugally they were given in England to popularisers of general knowledge. And when he said

in that case he would put on the title-pages of the Book of Knowledge 'Edited by Arthur Mee, Temple Chambers, London' (the office address!), I thought he was joking. But he assured me that in America that would look as good as 'M.A. (Oxon).' So for a number of years Arthur Mee of Temple Chambers, London, was a name to conjure with in thousands of American homes! A young American journalist who came as a guest one evening to a gathering of the Whitefriars Club in Dr. Johnson's house, which Cecil (now Lord) Harmsworth had presented to the nation, was far more thrilled at meeting Arthur there than by dining in the very room where 'the Great Lexicographer' had compiled his dictionary! He told me that in America the name of Arthur Mee was better known through his Book of Knowledge than that of any other educational writer or editor, and that he regarded himself as one of Arthur's pupils. In more recent years, however, his name has disappeared from the American edition, from no desire to rob him of his fame, but simply because the American edition has been so completely transmogrified under the editorship of Holland Thompson, Ph.D., Professor of History at the College of the City of New York, who had worked upon it continuously for thirty years until his death in 1940, that only what one might call the hard core of it and the outer frame of Arthur's original work survive. The process of Americanising has been complete for many years. But Arthur's 'credit title' is not forgotten, as an attractive booklet goes out to every 'Mr. Prospect' (American for likely purchaser) who answers any of the numerous advertisements of the Book of Knowledge that regularly appear in the press 'from coast to coast' telling the story of the wonder book which has grown in wonder since 1910. It begins with 'the Discovery of The Book of Knowledge idea' and rehearses what I have already told above as to how 'a young newspaper man' first thought of the Children's Encyclopædia. I think a few paragraphs from this booklet will bear reprinting here:

ROMANCE OF THE CHILDREN'S ENCYCLOPEDIA

This newspaper man—his name was Arthur Mee—went to his publisher with his idea. He proposed the publication of an unusual work to answer the most common questions asked by children. Such a work, he said, could be expanded until it would cover most of the world's knowledge.

It was to be simply written, illustrated with color, and dramatized so that children would read it as they would a story. Lavishly illustrated with pictures to hold attention and visualize for the child the knowledge it contained, this work, Arthur Mee believed, could also do a good teaching job in any home.

His publisher was enthusiastic. He thought so well of the idea that a staff of writers and artists was put to work immediately. In 1908, this new and original children's literature made its bow as 'The Children's Encyclopædia.'

Within a short time 'The Children's Encyclopædia' came to the attention of The Grolier Society, which immediately saw tremendous educational possibilities in the sale of artistic editions of this unusual work far beyond the original Arthur Mee idea.

I shall take leave to question the last half-dozen words of that extract. No man or society saw 'far beyond' the vision of the C.E.'s creator. But the vast territory of the U.S.A. compared with that of Great Britain and its overseas Dominions, not to mention the greater desire and far greater need of America's cosmopolitan population for educational literature, gave the Grolier Society an almost limitless field for exploitation. Then indeed was the time when Arthur could have become a millionaire, had he been willing to leave the land he loved and 'go west, young man!' But he wisely chose the better part, or, more truly, he never gave a thought to such a prospect.

There is another story about this American edition which I have told elsewhere, but which I am sure Arthur would like me to tell again. I had some personal contacts with the eminent American publisher George Haven Putnam, and it occurred to me soon after the success of the English serial was assured, that an American edition should be arranged without delay, so I suggested, before Jackson

CHILD OF WONDER

appeared upon the scene, that the highly reputable firm of G. P. Putnam's Sons should be approached. On one of his annual visits to London, where he used to come on business and to play tennis until over eighty, I invited him to lunch with us to discuss the idea. We spent most of an afternoon to no purpose, as Putnam could not be convinced that there was a market in America for the work, and if there were, his was not the firm to handle it. By one of those coincidences that occur every hour of every day, the Grolier Society had recently moved in as tenants of an upper floor of the imposing new Putnam Building in West 45th Street, New York, and one day in 1913 (on my way home from South America), when Jackson and I were going to the Grolier offices, we both had a quiet laugh at finding the sidewalk in front of Putnam's bookshop so cluttered with huge packing-cases full of Books of Knowledge that it was difficult to enter the shop. They were being unloaded from waggons for storing in the Grolier warehouse behind. The books that George Haven (as the head of the firm was familiarly known) had turned down!

One more item of interest which may have been known to Arthur, but has only now come to my knowledge, is related in that Grolier pamphlet from which I have quoted. I will give it as it is there recorded, as an example of the lordly way in which American publishers can make a gesture of admiration in these days of their abounding wealth:

Among President Roosevelt's inaugural gifts in 1941 was a richly bound set of *The Book of Knowledge*, manufactured at a cost of \$5,000. This set was presented to him by a group of his friends, who knew that he loved fine bindings and that his family had used the set during their children's growing-up years. The inaugural set was placed on display in the Roosevelt Hyde Park Library.

And here also I should mention that the Grolier Society control

the Canadian market, for which they provide a special Canadian edition of the Book of Knowledge.

We turn now to another chapter of the romantic history of the Children's Encyclopedia, as distinct from the Book of Knowledge, one that I know gave Arthur even greater pleasure; the foreign editions, most of which were negotiated by me. The first of these was the French edition. This was the outcome of an introduction from Jackson to an enterprising young publisher in Paris who had already made some success in music publishing. He brought it out in fortnightly Parts, as that method of issue was familiar there and in fact was originated on the Continent long before it was adopted in England. The title chosen for it was *Qui? Pourquoi? Comment?* with *L'Encyclopédie de la Jeunesse* for sub-title. It had been running for months with fair success and promise of greater things to come, when the second German onslaught upon France came like thunder from the north, and upset all the pleasant ways of life for the French people. The publisher, whose name was Jean Terquem, being of military age, was soon called to the colours, and all too soon had made the supreme sacrifice. His affairs were instantly thrown into confusion. The house of Larousse acquired the copyright and continued *l'Encyclopédie* to its conclusion. They also sold it as a collection with some success for years, but just before the third German War against France and the second against civilisation I was once more negotiating for a new edition. Of this all through the War there has naturally been not another word. But *Qui? Pourquoi? Comment?* was a worthy adaptation of the Children's Encyclopædia, and it may yet have a rebirth. Arthur was very proud of it. But prouder still of the Italian edition, which so long ago as 1909 personally arranged with the Milan firm of Cogliati, who continued publishing it for many years until, in 1926, when I spent some time in Milan effecting the transfer of all rights in it to the great publishing house of Arnoldo Mondadori, who remade it entirely and

launched a superbly produced edition in 1928. The Mondadori edition of *La Enciclopedia dei Ragazzi* was an immense success and had the patronage of Mussolini to help it in a strictly non-political way until that fatal day when he dragged his unhappy country into the War. It is a beautiful production from every point of view, and Arthur loved to show its superbly printed and finely bound volumes to his friends. Although Mussolini had made Mondadori a Cavaliere di Lavoro, I am glad to say that this most enterprising of all Italian publishers was unable to go all the way with his Duce, and with his family and various friends had to seek asylum in Switzerland for the last two years of the War. The German invaders seized his splendidly equipped printing works at Verona and in Milan to bolster up the evil man who had led Italy away from those who would have been her friends. Mondadori has now returned to control his large affairs and resume his valuable work for popular education, so that I look forward to Arthur's favourite foreign edition of the Children's Encyclopedia being revived with many years of good ahead of it.

A fine Spanish edition of the Encyclopedia was produced after Jackson's death (1923), and is having immense sales throughout all the lands of South America under the direction of his son, who is President of the W. M. Jackson Company which specialises from its New York headquarters and numerous branches in Latin-American editions. They also control a Portuguese edition, made in Lisbon by my friend the late Warren Kellogg, which is very popular in Brazil. But perhaps the best news of all that was ever reported to Arthur about that book of his heart and of his head was that a version of it had been translated into Chinese and published in 1927. There is in his library a beautifully bound copy of this in twenty volumes. All the Chinese letterpress is delightfully printed, but the illustrations, having been reproduced direct from the printed pages of the C.E. and not from the originals, are not so clear. I should doubt if any

ROMANCE OF THE CHILDREN'S ENCYCLOPEDIA

other English publication of equal length has ever had the honour of being translated into Chinese. China, by the way, was the home of the most enormous Encyclopedia ever produced: dating from the reign of Yung-loh in the 15th century, it consists of no fewer than 5,020 volumes! A copy of it in the British Museum is bound up in the handier shape of a mere 700 volumes.

And now it will be agreed, I think, that seldom in the lifetime of an editor who had created a great new work has there been wider acclaim from all quarters of the Globe to warm his heart with such unmistakeable evidence that he had done a noble work for humanity.

X

CHARACTERISTICS: MIND AND THE MAN

IN remembering our long years of friendship it would be difficult, I think, to imagine any two persons who differed more sharply in their individual outlooks upon life and yet through fifty years were always charged with joy in each other's company to such an extent that each derived from the other a flow of encouragement in his latest plans which materially helped towards their realisation. Arthur's nature made him ever ready to believe and to trust; I have always had a sceptical cast of mind, 'hot for certainties,' regardless whether the answer might be 'dusty,' in any case to weigh and consider before deciding. But one quality we must have had in common: a well-established tolerance, founded on a mutual sympathy that is difficult to express in the written word, as it went far deeper than anything that could be conveyed by the common and always sneering 'mutual admiration.' At any time of crisis in our lives one instinctively sought the other for communion and confidence. It was this mutual sympathy, which stood so many tests in the course of so many years, that makes me feel I can in the same moment think of him with uncommon intimacy and yet with some detachment arising from our different points of view, but never, even when we differed most, endangering the bond of sympathy.

No trait of character is more repugnant than that which makes one person carry a difference of opinion with another to the point of weakening friendship. Everybody can think of instances where

they have seen old friendships cooled, even broken, by a quarrel on some purely academic, religious, or political issue. I am sure that Arthur Mee never lost a friend or turned from an acquaintance as the result of giving or taking offence from mere difference of opinion. Yet no one was ever readier to stand up for his own beliefs and opinions. The freedom of expression which he demanded for himself he as readily allowed to those who differed from him. Where the question at issue was capable of being seen from at least two points of view—and which question is not?—he would listen to an opposite opinion as attentively as he expected his own to be heard, and thought none the worse of those who refused to agree with him. No ordinary quality of mind is this, and I have met few men or women who possessed it so markedly as Arthur Mee. I shall not attempt to enumerate the subjects on which we ‘agreed to differ’: they were many, and to his latest day I detected few on which discussion had greatly modified his opinion.

If one were to attempt a catalogue of his characteristics, which I do not purpose in any orderly way, half a dozen of the most strongly marked would be (1) his Christian faith, his unchanging belief in the Christian way of life; (2) his passionate love for his native land; (3) his conviction that the British Empire had been a source of great good to humanity; (4) his anxious concern for the welfare of the rising generation; (5) his hero worship; and (6) his deep joy in the tasks he had set himself. All these reveal themselves throughout this review of his life and work, and many more which could be related in some way to one or other of those just noted. His opinions and beliefs he insisted on the right to hold, and to utter freely, which he did with a degree of courage not too common. For hero-worshipper though he was, he was no time-server. Our friend Coulson Kernahan, who died full of years just three months before Arthur, told this story of him: ‘Lord Northcliffe said to me, “Do you know Arthur Mee intimately?” My reply was, “My wife and I have

stayed at his house and he and Mrs. Mee at ours, so I can say that I do; why?" Then Northcliffe went on, "He came into my room the other day to rebuke me for something that had been said in one of my newspapers, and told me it was not in accord with Christianity, and aired what Charles Whibley sneeringly described as 'The Non-conformist Conscience' to me, his chief. I wouldn't have stood it from anyone else, but I cannot help respecting that little champion of the Nonconformist Conscience, though I am not a Nonconformist myself." "

Many a time he took his chief to task about opinions expressed in his papers with which he did not agree, and the reader has already seen with what affection Northcliffe could still write to him, although his own opinions were strongly held. Arthur's courage of the mind was not without physical courage also. During the War of 1914-18, when he paid a visit to the British Front, he had a very narrow escape in Ypres, of which he wrote: 'I am not likely to forget the minute before we fled from the town, where soldiers stare at a civilian as something prehistoric, for a shell, that must have come ten miles, fell just behind me in the ruins of the Cloth Hall, burying itself in the rubble of this historic building, which may thus luckily have saved my life. It was as near as a man need wish to get to this war that is devastating our cities and saving our liberties.'

I first heard of this on one of my visits to the War, where I went in connection with two weekly records of the War which I was then editing. When we were in the Cloth Hall ruins, our guide, B. S. Townroe (himself a Nottingham man), now eminent as an authority on town planning and housing, who had been near Arthur when the shell burst, told me of his narrow escape and remarked on his sang froid. I don't remember Arthur himself ever speaking of it. He also bore himself well during the heavy bombing of Eynsford mentioned earlier.

Physically, Arthur was never robust, but very far from being a weakling. The tremendous mental energy at his command almost every day of his life must have required uncommon physical power to sustain it, but in his slight frame there seemed little room for any great reserve of bodily endurance to support the liveliness of his mind, to feed the fire of his ever-glowing enthusiasms. Hardly any part of his time was devoted to those physical sports and exercises popularly supposed to promote bodily health, although there is probably no class of the community less remarkable for longevity than the athletic and the sporting.

I can remember no games with which he interspersed his working days; there was certainly none at which he sought to excel. He never even had any desire to drive any one of the fine motor-cars he owned, and was content to be driven by a chauffeur until his daughter Marjorie grew up and developed a driving expertness that made her father prefer her at the wheel to any other driver. Cricket, football, and the other common games of youth had never attracted him; golf made no sort of appeal to him; but he was delighted to walk round the course with me or with his older friend John Derry and to see how placidly the latter drove the ball away and kept it on the fairway, while I demonstrated how much more exercise could be obtained by slicing it into the rough.

And in this matter of sport his good temper was as well displayed as in all his social relationships. He never despised any of those games or sports to which he was not himself attracted. He never, for instance, sneered at a footballer as a 'muddled oaf at the goal,' or pooh-poohed a golfer as a fellow who 'knocked a dirty little ball about with a silly big stick' (to quote the words of one of our friends). He was tolerant of the foibles of mankind, even the follies, always provided these did not invade the common rights of men or the so-called lower animals.

All sorts of healthy sports interested him, although his 'fly-

weight' frame debarred him from taking part in them himself. But while he was physically so slight that he could not cut any figure in the rough-and-tumble of football, or drive a golf ball 'far and sure,' he had no jealousy of those who could. He may have had some envy of their prowess, but admiration was always what he expressed. Every healthy form of sport, no matter how far beyond his own physique participation lay, had his approval. Only those so-called sports which involved cruelty, such as stag-hunting, coursing, or trapping in any of its many forms, were repulsive to him and were sure of a lashing from his incisive pen whenever the appropriate occasion offered.

On the other hand, he had no namby-pamby attitude of mind towards the lower orders of animal life. I once heard him refuse to support the anti-vivisectionists on the ground that discoveries of great value in the treatment of human disease had been made by experimenting on animals. His reverence for human life was so deep that, before he would ply his pen against vivisection, he declared he would require to be convinced, on the best scientific evidence, that those claims which had been made for the advancement of medical treatment of human disease as a result of vivisection were not capable of proof.

A common friend of ours was Alexander Paul, assistant editor of the Daily News, who, from some unfortunate personal experience, was opposed to compulsory vaccination, and very active forty years ago in campaigning against the Compulsory Vaccination Act; but Arthur, as the proud father of a little girl of four or five, refused to listen to Paul's case against the Act in view of the evidence then available in favour of its efficacy. We discussed this ten years later, after I had spent some twenty months in South America and had been able to witness at first hand the satisfactory effects of compulsory vaccination in Argentina, by contrast with the results of non-compulsion in Chile, where smallpox seemed to be as common as

scarlet fever, judging by the pock-marked men and women daily to be noticed in the streets of Santiago and Valparaiso. It will thus be seen he was no easy subject for the faddist to influence, and on all matters of similar importance to the social well-being of the community he demanded the fullest proof before he would become either an advocate or an antagonist.

Alongside an intelligent appreciation of his own value in the social pattern of his time—'a guid conceit o' himself' if you like—there was a corrective humility, by which his mind, so occupied with his conception of the Christian way of life, was always tempered. At no time, I am sure, was he ever in doubt regarding his innate power to meet whatever buffets fate might have in store for him, but this feeling of confidence in himself never bordered on assertiveness or approached condescension towards anyone. The demeanour of a minister we both knew and cordially disliked and that of a certain young man, who had started as one of Arthur's many office-boys, afforded us some private amusement, since both exemplified the sort of arrogance or 'swank' that he held in-contempt, as all sensible folk do.

The minister officiated at a little dissenting chapel somewhere in the outer suburbs of London and eked out his small stipend by contributing in a minor way to the religious press. And yet he spoke of his work as though he might have been the Dean of St. Paul's with the literary standing of a Farrar or an Inge—neither of whom would ever have spoken so importantly of himself! One day we went at his invitation to visit the editorial and publishing offices of a dying journal, which once had been well known but now in its decrepitude, with the death rattle in its throat, had been bought 'for an old song' by a friend for the ambitious literary pastor to edit and resuscitate. A first-class season and a rather sporty travelling rug, together with a bulky morocco portfolio, marked his editorial entry into the Street of Adventure. Merely laughable things these; but

what neither of us could stand was the brusque manner in which he addressed a few old employees at the office to show us how quickly he had acquired the rudiments of a managing editor! Within three months his great adventure ended with the final interment of the already dead periodical.

As for the office-boy, by a series of lucky turns he became a director of a cheap publishing house, and we used to enjoy meeting him occasionally to listen to the oral affectations he regarded as appropriate to his new dignity, and the advice which he so readily volunteered on how to run our respective publications. Long before 1943 both of these objects of our private amusement had become very old memories, having both made their exits from the scene; but I cannot help recalling them here as they embodied everything that was foreign to Arthur's nature: in the splendid days of success he never 'lost his head,' never was tempted to change his simple habit of dress, or to adopt a new and supposedly more impressive manner of speech even when addressing an office-boy. His demeanour to all was ever the same lively show of friendly interest that so appealed to me on the first day that I made his acquaintance as a member of my staff in Nottingham.

A characteristic which may well have passed unnoticed by many of his acquaintances, but was well known to his most intimate friends, was Arthur's trustfulness. He was no percipient judge of character, relying more upon first emotional reactions than upon any critical appreciation of a person. This led to occasional disappointments in his relations with some of the many who sought his acquaintance in the early days of his remarkable editorial success, and still more in the heyday of his journalistic activity, when he had become so eminently 'worth knowing' for his ability to employ the pens of scores of other writing men. But it also disclosed a trait which, even in his disappointments, had a quality of goodness that compelled admiration.

PLATE VII



Characteristic photograph of
Arthur taken at Eynsford
Hill when at the height of
his activities as editor and
author, and, inset, Mrs. Mee
in 1916.

PLATE VIII



Photo: J. Scott-Dixon

Arthur Mee at his desk in The Fleetway House in the early days of The Children's Newspaper, and seated in a pergola at Eynsford Hill.

He was rather inclined to accept new-comers within his circle at their own face value, and seldom in the first instance perceived a difference between the 'flatterer for gain' and the honest admirer. Himself without guile, he trusted everyone . . . until he found some of them less trustworthy than he had imagined. His hero-worshipping habit was so pronounced that he turned a deaf ear to members of his own family who were shrewder than he in 'seeing through' some of the many who sought his friendship, and not until he had found these out for himself would he listen to one word in their detraction. But then his sorrow at being deceived mingled with an indignation which meant the abrupt end of that acquaintance. As I had never hesitated to express my opinions in these cases long before he had any personal grounds for agreeing with me, when that time arrived the subject of his disillusionment was never mentioned! An ivory carving of the Three Wise Monkeys, which once figured among his overflowing bric-à-brac, nicely expressed his attitude towards his friends: 'Speak no evil, hear no evil, see no evil.' What I might call the spectrum of humanity had small place in Arthur's philosophy of character: the shades of colour were less considered than their absence or negation; white or black sufficed for him, and his white men greatly outnumbered his black. This, of course, was one of the many attributes of youth that persisted in him, and whatever loss it implied to the fullness of his judgement in such matters was far outweighed by the enthusiasm that it helped to sustain through all his years.

His hero-worship never grew stale, as his *Hero Book* (1921), an individual volume, bore witness. This was further emphasised by Arthur Mee's 1000 Heroes, a serial publication twelve years later, but with doubtful success, as the particular public to whom the Part works appealed did not seem to be so interested as its editor in reading about a whole thousand heroes! His delight in round figures will be noticed once again, but the round figure here had evidently run

to obesity. Had he been born in Scotland in the days of the Covenanters he might have been a rival of Old Mortality. He did his best in his own day and way in getting many worn-out inscriptions on neglected monuments restored. On his travels through the land for his King's England series, he came upon many examples of such neglected memorials. A noteworthy instance was the attention he drew in 1931 to the monument at Plymouth under which the hearts of Frobisher and Blake are buried.

With all his fixed ideas, what might even be called his prejudices, he was the soul of tolerance. When he had overcome his Puritan objection to the theatre, he became a frequent playgoer, and Barrie's *Dear Brutus* was one of his favourites. He had seen it several times, and listening to the broadcast of the play one night at home, when he heard Lob (who has burst into tears) declaring as the members of the party hesitated at going into the magic wood, 'I wanted you to go. I had set my heart on your going. It is the thing I wanted, and it isn't good for me not to get the thing I want'—when Arthur heard those well-known lines, he tapped his breast and said with comic intensity '*That's me, too!*' This was true, but it would be a false reading of his character further to identify with old Lob. That vein of freakishness which his friend Bryant touches upon in a reminiscence already quoted never petered out. Once only did he work one of his tricks on me, when I found him seated in my study at Highgate crosslegged in an easy chair pretending to be engrossed in a book, having arrived much earlier than he was expected and instructed the maid not to announce him. There were times, however, when he made surprise visits, hoping that the surprise element would give pleasure, only to find it caused embarrassment. This happened once when he called on Sir William and Lady Watson at Peacehaven, where they were living in a small house lent to them by the owner because of the poet's unfortunate circumstances at the time. He found the poet, whom he revered, drying up the tea dishes

in the kitchenette! It all ended happily, however, and Arthur was able to help Watson quite substantially by reprinting selections of his poetry. A letter I had from Lady Watson informed me that no name was so honoured in their house as that of Arthur Mee. As I was enlisted by him in his efforts to help the Watsons, I can say that the distress which his 'surprise' caused him on that occasion—it would have been no surprise in 1945—was more than compensated by the satisfaction he had in being able to help. Nothing so pleased him as contriving to do somebody a good turn. For along with his liking to do the things he wanted to do went another quality; he would have liked everybody to do what they wanted to do! Provided always that they in no wise offended against his fairly rigid code of morals. He was without envy of the wealth of others, and in surrounding himself with beautiful things in a charming home he would have rejoiced if all his friends could have done the like. His own condition of life for more than forty years was one of abundant good things, and every pound he spent had come to him as reasonable reward for the product of his brain, his natural ability, and a capacity for working rarely equalled and never excelled in his profession.

In part at least the productivity of Arthur Mee as a writer was due to his methodical habits. I used to say to him in the early days of our collaboration that he had evidently been meant for a Methodist rather than a Baptist. No writing man known to me was ever so completely systematic in his way of working, but although this made for increased productiveness it had nothing whatever to do with the high excellence of the things he wrote. That was inborn. No amount of method could have achieved that so-long-sustained energy of thought and felicity of expression. But it does explain to some extent the volume of his work, especially when we conjoin with his highly systematised working method an uncommon power of concentration.

I do not consider he was in any way noteworthy above the average for feats of memory. Actually he did not trust enough to his memory to develop its power beyond the ordinary. All his life his pockets were full of *aide mémoire* in the form of little slips of paper with the key words pencilled on them, and during a luncheon, or conversation of any kind, it was a common thing for him to detach a number of the little perforated pages from his note-book and stuff them in a waistcoat pocket to be ready for pursuing the ideas which had been pencilled as soon as he was back at his beloved desk. His efforts to induce in me a similar habit, by presenting me from time to time with one of his latest pocket devices for providing the right size and quality of note-paper on which to jot down those fleeting thoughts, were never very successful, and I continued to let memory exercise itself without such aids, just as I am doing throughout this present book where, with the natural exceptions of matters on which I had not previously informed myself, I rely with confidence mainly on memory. And the farther away in time or place the event on which memory is at work, the more likely is it to be accurate. To trace Arthur's method as I have had the opportunity of doing in the astonishing minutiae of his preparatory notes for works done and works intended to be written if the time had been vouchsafed to him, has been a fascinating though melancholy experience in that famous Hilltop library of his where, at the time of this writing, everything seemed conscious of the order he so loved, thanks to the same loving hands that helped to perfect it in his lifetime.

His passion for orderliness was to be noted in other ways and not always quite rationally. For example, he could not bring himself to begin his lunch or dinner at any of the clubs or restaurants we were wont to frequent until he had seen the one glass of water he allowed himself by way of beverage placed upon the table. He never took soup at these meals in public, for having cultivated a moustache since the earliest days of manhood, with the idea of looking at least

as old as he was instead of being taken for five or ten years less, he so disliked to see others equally hirsute on the upper lip straining the consommé through their moustaches, that he preferred to do without such liquid food! But he would let his mutton chop go cold while urging a negligent waiter to bring his glass of water, rather than make a start with his meal, and yet he would not drink off his glass until the end of his repast. That glass of water had to be there according to plan, and seemed to fill some essential corner in his design for dining!

That freakishness which occasionally failed of its purpose, I had at least one opportunity of discovering when Percy L. Parker, then well known as editor-proprietor of *Public Opinion*, asked me to meet him at lunch expressly to show me a wildly imaginative epistle of many pages which he had just received from Arthur on his visit to Egypt. Parker, a very serious person, was indignant that our common friend should have written him such a manifestly exaggerated account of an 'adventure in the desert.' I thought it was entirely amusing, but P. L. P. was 'not amused.' He said he did not like to be treated to 'that sort of boyish nonsense' and would 'have it out with Arthur when he came home.' I doubt if he ever quite understood our happy-hearted friend, who suffered a dreadful disappointment when Parker, an active, lifelong Nonconformist, and by that token a friend of Arthur's, was induced to be received into the Church of Rome just in time to be given extreme unction on his death-bed—April 1, 1925.

Although it is nearly forty years since I took Arthur to a little gathering of Fleet Street men to listen to Sir Robert Ball, the famous astronomer, who did so much to popularise the study of the stars, I like to recall that, after the lecture, we were amongst the few who remained behind to have a more intimate talk with the genial scientist, and to have the privilege of seeing for the first time a tiny speck of radium which Sir Robert was carrying in one of his

waistcoat pockets well protected by various wrappings of chamois leather. Radium at that time was as new a discovery as the atomic bomb is today, and I shall not forget the eagerness with which Arthur awaited his first sight of it. The electric lights in the small room were switched off, and great was our surprise to see the tiny speck of luminous metal shooting out its sparks of light faster than we could count, but not much faster than the questions which Arthur fired off at the demonstrator, who did his best to keep up with the 'Whys?' and 'Hows?' and 'Whens?' and 'Whats?' Indeed, Arthur did all the questioning for the group around the burly figure of Sir Robert.

I have often thought of Arthur since then as having possessed some of the qualities of that radium: qualities he shared to some extent with Northcliffe, with W. T. Stead, and other great journalists I have known. Every moment of his life he was emitting sparks of suggestion, enquiry, fancy. His mind never seemed to be at rest, his attitude seldom contemplative. And I can remember Northcliffe saying to me one day when we were discussing Arthur and this radio-active quality of his, that his mind was really too active for his physique, so that he was afraid—it was at the time when Northcliffe's own physical condition was beginning to preoccupy his thoughts—that 'Arthur's trouble would eventually be mental.' But, as time disclosed, the prophecy rebounded on the prophet, for he it was that had to suffer 'mental trouble,' while Arthur never had any clouding of the mind for all the mental activity he maintained to the last days of his life, which exceeded Northcliffe's by eleven years.

He had a 'singing heart,' a merry heart that went all the way, and no matter how serious he might be he was ever ready for a laugh. He even filed for future reference notes of such trifles as printers' errors that occurred in his constant handling of proof sheets. One of those he seems especially to have treasured was the final press proof of a page from one of his series of 'Arthur Mee's Letters,'

addressed to 'the boys of the future,' which he saved at the last moment from reaching the boys of the present. The fifth of the series, it was headed in bold type 'To the Boy who Loves a Cook.' If any such boy there was, he would have read on with some surprise: 'Have you ever thought that Alfred the Great or William the Conqueror *never read a book?*' It was part of his charm that not all his contemplation of the serious side of life with which all his writings are concerned could abate his boyish interest in trifles such as these. But there is hardly a glimpse of this side of him to be detected in his public work. Even when he has an opening such as the paragraph I give below he is content to be slightly satirical.

Very Much Like a Donkey.—The law may not be quite an ass, but it is sometimes very much like a donkey. We noted the other day that an American in London was not allowed to lay a wreath on the statue of Burns. Yet we remember that some practical joker laid a wreath on Charles Stuart's statue in the forged name of the Editor of the C.N. and we were not allowed to move it. It is curiouser and curiouser, as Alice would say, that we can neither lay an honest wreath nor remove a dishonest one.

Though he had little or no knowledge of music, he took increasing delight in listening to it, but never developed any taste for grand opera. For oratorio he had a passionate liking, probably arising from its religious background, and the emotional effect of the swelling choral movements, for he had a pronounced sentimental streak in him which thrilled to harmonious sound. For years he booked seats for his friends and himself long in advance and looked forward eagerly to the Handel Festival, at which he would spend rapt hours under the spell of the majestic music of the master of oratorio. But Rutland Boughton's music for Fiona Macleod's 'The Immortal Hour' equally possessed him, as he is credited with having gone to the first production of that mystical drama and revisited it during its run at the Regent's Theatre and on its later

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revivals something like twenty times! The music touched a chord of sentiment which vibrated deliciously apart from the words of the drama itself, words of which he had not been too critical, as he was once open to argue with me that in the 'Young Minstrel's' song,

*I have seen all things pass and all men go
Under the shadow of the drifting leaf . . .*

'things' was repeated where I knew it could be nothing else than 'men.' I had been familiar with the poem long before it was put to music, and one visit on its first production sufficed me. But a self-confident youth who has now grown up to be a member of parliament told me it was the finest contribution to English music in this century. Arthur might have thought so too, but unlike this youth he had not had a musical education and could not play the piano! So he wisely expressed his liking for a sensuous style of music which he was unable to criticise. The poem itself belongs to the Celtic Twilight, and that, too, lay somewhere beyond his dreams. My criticism of the particular lyric mentioned was the inappropriateness of letting a *young* minstrel sing it.

While Arthur knew what he liked, without necessarily knowing why, and it was not good for him not to get what he wanted, few that I have known have ever shown an equal ingenuity for so arranging things that they eventually got their own way. His offices became overloaded with office-boys because every time he rang for one to take away some copy he had just edited, or to bring him something he wanted, if no boy instantly answered his bell Miss Lillie was empowered to engage another. In this way the youngsters soon threatened to exceed the senior members of the staff, and a day came when there had to be a thinning of their ranks. A thing he hated to have to do. 'Arthur is good at engaging,' said a director of the firm to me

one day, 'but I am good at sacking,' and he smacked his lips as though he loved that part of his job. No matter how inefficient any member of Arthur's staff might have proved, he disliked the thought of having to dismiss him. 'My silly little heart will fail me at the critical moment,' he once remarked when the need was urgent. One of those numerous office-boys, in our early days at Carmelite House, I had often encountered carrying tray-loads of teas through the corridors, yet he was never on the spot to do the least job of work required of him. Investigation disclosed that he was doing a big trade as tea-provider throughout the building and had just purchased a new motor bicycle out of his profits! Arthur, who had once presented this bright youth to the Chief as the finest office-boy in Carmelite House, was shocked at his duplicity, while rather admiring his enterprise. But his heart was not so silly as to condone such ill-directed enterprise, and the finest office-boy disappeared in the dusk and the twilight so far as we were concerned.

We have heard something of his love for slogans, but it should be said that they were seldom worded in self-admonishment, as they seem to be in America, where they used to be so common. Indeed, the average Englishman has never been so ready as his American cousin to pin up wall texts in his home or office, even if investigation might discover that 'God bless our home' as decorative mural card originated in the old land. The habit of pinning up less worthy mottoes was running to excess in the early years of this century on the other side of the Atlantic and was for a time mildly imitated in England, one of the American injunctions 'Do It Now!' being widely favoured. Whether these monitory mottoes exercised any salutary effect upon the sluggard, to whom the copy-book's 'Procrastination is the Thief of Time' had grown contemptible through familiarity, may be open to doubt, but nobody ever stood in less need of such mental spurring than Arthur Mee. 'Do It Now' was the key to much of his extraordinary achievement. And I shall suggest

that it was of a piece with that part of him which never quite grew up: his childlike impatience. If at times it led him to give shape to many an idea which was later abandoned, there was still great gain, as this trait of his had the merit of putting his endless flow of ideas to the test before he sent many of them to limbo, and only when, as sometimes happened, he pushed on with an idea with the feeling that to abandon it might seem an exhibition of impatience (having really lost taste of it) was he likely to have cause for regret.

There has been frequent mention of his enthusiasm, but I may not have remarked upon something he possessed even more precious: the gift of communicating his enthusiasm to others. There is a sense in which this is the concomitant of all enthusiasms, but in his case it was present in unusual measure. No one who ever spent an hour with him discussing some matter in which both were interested, his visitor perhaps more so than Arthur, left without a feeling of new confidence in himself. Many were they who went home in the evening after a talk with Arthur in his office one afternoon to be told they were in better spirits than usual and to be asked what had happened to buck them up. His own high spirits and buoyancy were infectious, and if there were cases where the infection soon wore off he could have no blame for that; some are allergic even to encouragement and sympathy.

Referring to his methods in writing and reading which I have touched upon but lightly so far, Arthur had claimed to write as much as a million words in the course of one year, a claim I shall examine. His literary impulse (by which I do not mean 'book learning' but interest in literature *per se*) was weaker than the ethical: the urge to write about every good cause that had taken a place in his thoughts, or to denounce the things he regarded as evil. As a reader of books it is difficult for one person to judge another except on the evidence of the other's bookish habit of mind as that is disclosed by his writing. But it is hardly possible for any one man to write a

million words each year and yet to have read widely and deeply in the same twelve months. Now Arthur often claimed to have done the first of these things, and I have little reason to question his own estimate of his annual wordage, knowing as I do how, with pen and blue pencil, he revised and largely rewrote innumerable articles received from contributors whose phrasing did not please his ear or whose ideas were not expressed with the clarity he demanded as an editor; how he could hammer out on his typewriter his own thoughts as fast as these arose in his mind; and how he had also mastered the difficult art of dictation—knowing all this I was quite willing to credit those million words per annum. But if we allow him only one fortnight in the year for a holiday the result is 20,000 words each week, and if he read no faster than any practised reader the amount of time at his disposal for the study of serious literature must have been relatively small. One does not think of him as reading often *pour passer le temps*. I would even go the length of suggesting that he spent more time in writing than in reading. Poetry was his chief mental refreshment, and in our 'standard' poets he was certainly well read, but so far as I know he never attempted to compose a verse himself. If the Baconian dictum is true (of which I am in doubt) that 'reading maketh a full man, conference a ready man, and writing an exact man,' then Arthur was no full man, but if writing makes for exactitude (which I also doubt) there were few more 'exact' men than Arthur Mee! I would also add regarding his taste in poetry: he did not allow it to extend to any one of the Moderns, which must be written down a limitation.

Yet, judged solely by the objective evidence of his writings, his knowledge of modern writers and their books was extensive if not peculiar, and would seem to have involved wide acquaintance with their works. 'Acquaintance' is the operative word. And perhaps we have an illustration of this in the case of a more celebrated personality: none other than Mr. Winston Churchill, of whom his one-

time secretary and earliest biographer, the late A. MacCallum Scott, tells us that a glance through his bookshelves revealed that many volumes from which he had made quotations, or to which he had referred in his own writings, bore pencil marks against certain entries in their indexes, indicating that he had made their acquaintance rather for the immediate purpose of informing himself on those specific matters than for any closer study of their text. That possibly explains Arthur's insistence on the indexing of all books that record facts or mention persons or places. I know that he read but little fiction after he had passed his twenty-fifth year.

But before he reached that entrancing age ('with the best will no man can be twenty-five for ever,' R. L. S.) I am sure this Child of Wonder had been an omnivorous reader, and as Robertson Nicoll used to say, 'the reading that matters most to the journalist are the books he read before he was twenty-five.' In the forty-three years that Arthur was happily spared to write and edit beyond that magical age his quite remarkable gift of opening a book and quickly spotting the passages that interested him, without having to wade through the whole, was the tautest string to his bow.

When one has written, typed, and dictated 20,000 words in a week, and has also read through the most important items of the leading journals each morning, evening, and week-end, selecting therefrom numerous subjects for his editorial staff to deal with, and thereafter revised in print all his own writing, as well as gone through and touched up the work of his assistants—well, what time remains for 'reading for pleasure' or recreational reading? So far as these terms meant anything to Arthur they applied all through his best working years to every moment of his time, for what sounds to the layman like mere slavery of the lamp was to him a labour to be delighted in.

In his early manhood he took some interest in Spencérian philosophy, and I remember the eagerness with which he read Herbert

Spencer's somewhat portentous Autobiography, to which he was attracted more from the biographical point of view than for the elucidation of any philosophic methods. His mind was not of the ratiocinative kind. It might be doubted if he ever attempted to arrive at a judgement by means of any syllogistic process of deductive reasoning. I am sure that a syllogism on the printed page a syllogism was to him, and it was nothing more. His mind was ever too simple, too inductive, intuitive, to await the issue of a mediate proposition. He felt more readily than he understood. He was conscious of rightness without being assured of his feelings by a process of thinking which required a mental approach to the subject. And although here and there in his writings I have detected occasional echoes of our old discussions concerning Spencer, Huxley, and Tyndall, these have usually had reference to the personalities of those great thinkers; their human side, not their philosophic outlook on life and its mysteries. As, for example, a story he was fond of recalling which told of Spencer and Huxley bathing in the sea, and both of them, as they contemplated each other's naked bodies, being seized with laughter when one remarked to the other that the strangest thing he could think of was the fact that it should have been given to such puny, defenceless creatures as the species they represented to be the masters of the world!

No, it would be a misreading of Arthur Mee's true character to place him among the notable thinkers of his epoch, his insatiable inquisitiveness concerning the manifold aspects of nature and science never led him to apply his mind to the study of any one of these in particular. He was content to be daily informing himself about the latest discoveries in the realm of the natural sciences and to acquire an intelligent knowledge of these which he could apply with the most surprising effect as he passed it on to his innumerable readers. In this way his mind became encyclopedic, his range of knowledge vast; but he did not attempt a scholarly mastery of any

one of the myriad subjects that engaged his nimble and understanding intellect.

This was another secret of his success with the general reading public, young and old, who discovered in him a brilliant and stimulating introducer to the wonders of the world as these were presenting themselves to his own keen quest for the wonders which life was daily yielding up to him via the specialists in every branch of investigation. He had the power to make plain to the average man, woman, and child the aspects and imports of the problems which the very men who had wrested them from nature could not make so plain.

And what must be emphasised is the fact that he seldom misinterpreted the new knowledge thus acquired. He could so quickly grasp its implications that his reader is often inclined to marvel that 'one small head could carry all he knew.' As a matter of fact, no man could be so universally wise as Arthur seemed to be in his endless discursions on scientific subjects: much of the matter which he gave forth with such apparent ease of knowledge, and which undoubtedly fired thousands of his readers to further study of the subjects that had most attracted them, did not stay in his own mind to the modification of the general trend of his thought: it was not correlated there, it did not fuse with other elements in his mind to create knowledge in the true sense of that word. But therein lay his power as a populariser of knowledge in its more general sense.

His ability to expound matters on which he had no real learning such as a scholar would have to substantiate was probably unequalled in his time. He certainly conformed to the second of Dr. Johnson's definitions of knowledge: 'We know a subject ourselves, or we know where we can find information upon it.' The very alert mind of Arthur Mee knew where to turn for his information at any moment, and his journalistic genius enabled him to apply the knowledge thus acquired with a skill of presentation and a proper

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appreciation of the wonder element that could fascinate and instruct the reader to a degree which few of the learned specialists have ever attained.

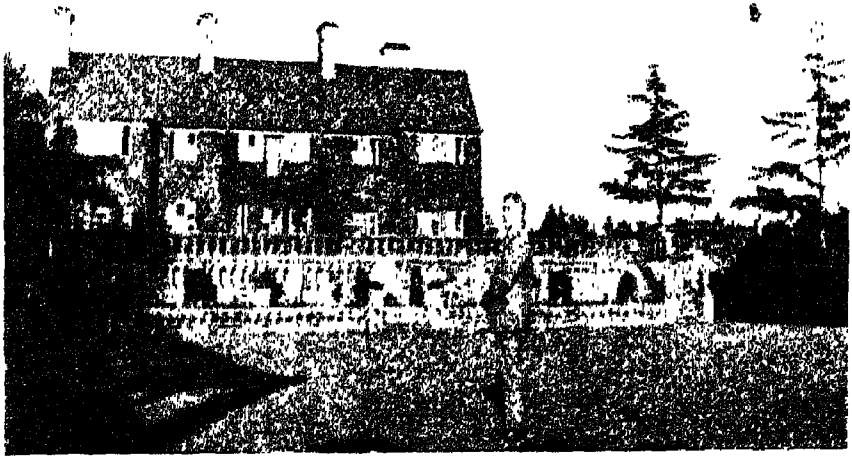
Those qualifications I have been making, it must be borne in mind, refer entirely to that body of his work which falls within the category of popular science as distinguished from the more important side of his vast literary output which was inspired by ethical and political questions, or by the abiding joyous impulse of his life where the fervour of his religious faith took control of his pen and enabled him to accomplish that 'inner mission' of which he would seem to have been clearly aware from his youth onward. The union of the two impulses in the one person to the extent that they existed side by side in the mental make-up of Arthur Mee is unusual, and mainly accounts in my judgement for the immense popularity which his work obtained in his lifetime and which it will exercise for many a year to come.

XI

THE FAITH OF ARTHUR MEE

THE First Great War cuts across the life of Arthur Mee with the precision of a boundary line marking two joined but distinctive entities. Up to 1914 all his mind-power, his full mental energy, had gone to the creating of a series of remarkable works for the popularising of general knowledge; first, for the adult public which stood much in need of instruction to extend what little it had come by in the State-provided schools of the people, and secondly to make the school years of the younger generation more intellectually profitable and vastly more pleasurable than was possible from perfunctory lessons provided for them out of the public rates. It would hardly be an exaggeration to say that his *Children's Encyclopedia* brought to the young folk of the decade immediately preceding the War of 1914-18 a new delight in their schooling and supplemented the educative value of their lessons in a way that no preceding generation had been privileged to enjoy. While the popularity of the *Children's Encyclopedia* continued without a break and actually went on increasing, its founder crossed into new territory on the other side of that boundary line which cut his life-work into two distinct fields. The Crusader spirit in him had now found the opportunity it had long been seeking in his subconscious. A new and still more thrilling career opened for him, or more truly was begun by his own genius for adaptation.

Further undertakings on the ambitious lines of those which had flourished in the ten wonderful years were out of the question while the War lasted. His monthly *My Magazine* not being sufficient to



Photos: J. Seall-Dix

Above, Eynsford Hill from the lawn, its owner in a familiar pose, and,
below, from the Entrance Courtyard on the farther side.



Above, Guide Lieut. Marjorie Mee and her father at Eynsford Hill,
and, below, Arthur and Amy Mee, with Marjorie standing.

burn up the whole fire of his enthusiasm, he set out upon a crusade which, whether it won through to its avowed end or failed, was a matter of less certainty than that it was to discover hitherto unsuspected powers in its 'preacher.' That crusade was the Strength of Britain movement, long forgotten now by the survivors of that period and quite unknown to the post-war generation, but memorable as a great chapter in Arthur's story, because it set the compass of his mind for the rest of his journey.

Into the Strength of Britain Arthur threw himself with all the energy he would have given to some large new editorial enterprise had the time for that been propitious. The movement, started as a 'one man show,' quickly attained to full national dimensions. Many persons eminent in social service joined his crusade as public speakers or subscribers. Here he was in his element, conducting a vast correspondence, employing at his Eynsford home and in his office special secretaries to cope with it, writing numerous pamphlets for distribution, employing various lecturers to spread the doctrine of Prohibition, which he set forth with all the fire of his faith, organising petitions to M.P.s, to Parliament itself—one of these I recently examined with some astonishment in his library archives had not far short of three thousand signatories, many being famous men and women—and on the top of all this, with the War drawing towards its end, he wrote a remarkable book of about 70,000 words entitled *Who Giveth Us the Victory*, published by Allen & Unwin at a time that was inauspicious for book-publishing.

By a concatenation of events so different from any in the Second World War, paper was not so scarce in 1918 as in 1945, but far fewer books were published and the demand for those that were issued was much below that current in the last year of Hitler. Had *Who Giveth Us the Victory* been among the books of 1945 its circulation would have been far in excess of whatever it was in 1918, and worthily; yet, to my surprise, his entry in *Who's Who* does not even mention

it. He wrote a number of small books as propaganda for his crusade, such as *Defeat or Victory*, *The Fiddlers*, *The Parasite*, which I read at the time but only vaguely recall today as being well adapted to their purpose of the moment and of little interest now, although they were circulated to the extent of a million and a half as Arthur notes in his *Who's Who* entry. Why its author should have omitted *Who Giveth Us the Victory* from his list I cannot divine. It was not only the first book, as distinct from pamphlet, which he had written since 1901, but by way of being his first confession of faith. The stronger reason, therefore, to give it some consideration here.

Its interest ranges far beyond the immediate question of Prohibition, and it was written at a time when his concern for 'the Strength of Britain' was somewhat wilting, the reasons for which I shall do no more than hint at here. Everything worthy in that movement he inspired. And it may have done more good than was assessable before it went the way of many well-intentioned efforts in the same direction. I seldom discussed with him this entirely altruistic venture of his, having seen enough of the inside of the temperance movement in the days of my youth to be opposed to the idea of Prohibition, and Arthur was soon to learn what was happening to Prohibition as a *fait accompli* in the United States, which may have gone some way to console him for his own crusade falling short of the high hopes with which he launched it. So widespread was the sympathy with Arthur's crusade throughout the country, so great the encouragement he received from the most eminent leaders in social reform, that the Strength of Britain had very quickly attained the proportions of a national movement. A leader even less sanguine than Arthur would have had every reason to believe he had set afoot a reform that would have salutary effects upon the drinking habits of his countrymen; perhaps bring about a new era of temperance that would transform the history of social Britain for years to come. Dr. Clifford, the eminent Nonconformist leader,

speaking at a mass meeting in support of the movement, declared 'its effect on the nation has been very forcibly set out by Arthur Mee, a dear friend of mine—one of the most indefatigable and also one of the most Christian men I know, and for his work in this connection he deserves the thanks of the whole nation.'

Dr. Stuart Holden said the growing interest in Prohibition was due to Arthur Mee's brilliant exposition of the drink evil and his advocacy of the Cause more than to the work of any other publicist. He received little support from the Church of England leaders, however, possibly because his very pronounced Nonconformist opinions tended to antagonise at that time those who clung to the Established Church as firmly as he held to his Nonconformity: a cleavage in the religious world which has greatly narrowed during the last thirty years. His friend Kennedy Jones, who was Alfred Harmsworth's colleague in the founding of the Daily Mail, made a wisecrack about Arthur in a London weekly which, as the event proved, had more than a grain of truth in it. Asked 'Who is going to rob the working-man of his beer?' he replied 'Not Mee!'

It was not the first time, nor will it be the last, that an effort to organise a work of social reform failed as much from difficulties within the movement as from opposition without. But where honest endeavour towards any ideal has been made, it can never be all waste effort, and we may well believe that the immense outpouring of his energy which Arthur gave to the Strength of Britain was not without good effect upon the scores of thousands of readers he had reached, and the enriching of his own experience of life. Its failure left no scar on his inward self. Of this there is no better proof than that which is furnished by a reading of *Who Giveth Us the Victory*.

There is relatively little about 'the drink question' in the book, but much that confirms the faith of its writer, which was to be reiterated time and again in a score of other books he wrote in the

'years between' that War and the more disastrous one that followed, the end of which he was not fated to see. It is dedicated 'to all who believe,' and a glance at its contents will indicate the appropriateness of the inscription: (1) 'God Intervening,' discusses 'the impregnable rock of faith,' (2) 'God and His Kingdoms,' eleven chapters in which the author seeks to glimpse 'the boundless realms of life and matter and mind,' (3) 'Man and the Universe,' six chapters on the 'great alliance of the mighty forces of evolution,' (4) 'The Combat of Good and Evil,' where in ten more he reviews a remarkable medley of ethical and moral subjects from Calvary to the obtuseness of our political leaders, (5) 'The Peace of Great Britain,' in which he essays to answer the question 'Was it worth keeping?' and in the process makes a powerful indictment of the drink traffic, and (6) 'The End of It All,' wherein he sees the vision splendid.

Now, I have given the lay-out of this very remarkable book mainly to illustrate the fine sense of order which made him so supremely effective both in the presentation of a case and the building of a book. The forty chapters into which this one is divided all carry the most attractive headings, and there is a regular crescendo of interest which can end only in the peruser determining to get on with the reading. I read the book through twenty-eight years ago and have just re-read it with a higher opinion than I remember to have formed of it in 1918. What I think of its philosophy, its science, its ethical and moral value would make a large subject to discourse upon and involve a disproportionate amount of space in my present scheme, but there is no book from his pen so completely revealing, at the stage of his spiritual development when it was written, and if I find in it more to admire than to call in question, I would remind the reader that on many points of theology Arthur and I remained irreconcilable through all our years of friendship. Himself, he somewhat modified the fundamentalism of his early religious training, still strong upon him thirty years ago, giving way

here and there before a fuller comprehension of the implications of the greatest discovery of the nineteenth century which he had followed intently in the works of Darwin, of Huxley, and Herbert Spencer, but with no diminishing faith in the Gospels, which remained 'the impregnable rock' of his faith, as he expresses it, doubtless from his earlier reading of Gladstone's *Impregnable Rock of Holy Scripture*.

The English Bible was not only the source of his faith but also the main inspiration of his literary manner. In the matter of style his writing gives no indication that he ever 'played the sedulous ape' in the formation of a literary style, but at every turn it discloses his intimate knowledge of the prose of Tyndale and Coverdale, which, with his own natural and fluent method of expressing himself, rendered all that he wrote *sui generis*. It is never the style of the 'scholar': it is far too lively, exuberant, humane for that. But it is brilliantly suitable to his message, and even when it is exuberant to a fault it does not greatly overstep the occasion.

As the book which has prompted those reflections is one of his lesser-known works, I shall linger a little with it the better to illustrate what I have been endeavouring to convey. A very old book, a book that was old when I was young, was called *The Finger of God in History*. I know that it influenced Silas K. Hocking, one of the best known of the popular story-tellers of two past generations and the common friend of Arthur Mee and the present writer. I was often reminded of it in reading *Who Giveth Us the Victory*, but I doubt if it was known to Arthur, who saw the finger of God in everything. His opening paragraph might well have been written in 1945 instead of 1918:

The victorious Allies of Europe, when they bring home their flags waving high, will have saved the world from something worse than death, but they will have saved it, also, from something more appalling than they knew. They will have saved mankind from the loss of its faith

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in God. The faith in the Creator and Sustainer of the world could hardly survive the victory of the forces of devilry in Europe. The German Government, when it sent its army to march on Belgium, was making war on God. It did not believe in God. It lied to the world and mocked at its Creator. Let it be never forgotten that the mastery of the German was to be not over empire only, but over the mind of the world.

Ever fascinated by the discoveries of science, in which he kept himself well informed though specialising in no particular department, and seeking always to reconcile every new discovery with his continuing faith in the God of Israel, occupied much of his thought throughout this noteworthy book, as witness:

The Creator of the World, the beneficent Ruler of Mankind, the Eternal Father of His Children, is not the invention of some ancient priest, that we should be afraid lest He crumble. The Everlasting God can stand foursquare to all the winds that blow. The Church that is afraid God will collapse, and faith break down, and the pulpit fall to pieces if science is true, is an idol of Baal and will perish. He who laid the foundations of the earth when the morning stars sang together has no need of it. The God of Moses, the God of the beginning and the end, is not smothered in a scientific text-book. Science has no contradiction of God; it has no conflict with Truth. Science is the name we give to man's explanations of God's universe, and the deeper we peer into science, the more inevitable and illimitable is God. . . . It is a long time since men believed that everything on earth was made of air, earth, fire, and water; but it is not long since men believed that an atom of matter was one of God's foundation-stones, the thing we could not get beyond. But now we see the very atoms breaking up, and beyond them is a world of wonder rivalling the stars themselves. Up in the telescope, down in the microscope, the mind of man staggers and reels as he looks. . . .

. . . One thing is certain; the discoveries of new powers and their applications will be immeasurably beyond all human experience, and the child born in the Great War will live on into a world beyond imagination now. It is not the scientific but the unscientific mind, says Darwin, that sets limits to the possibilities of knowledge, and it is ignorance, and not wisdom, that talks of Evolution as if it had stopped. We are only beginning to be Evolution conscious, and already the new chapter is wonderful beyond comparison. We have found that matter is a colossal

reservoir of energy. We have begun to tap it, and already we have captured electricity. We have found that Paul was speaking like a scientist, and not only like a preacher, when he said, 'The things that are seen are temporal, the things that are not seen are eternal'; and we have harnessed unseen things to carry a thought across the world as fast as we can think it, and to carry the human voice across the world faster than Nature can carry it without our aid.

And finally this, written twenty-eight years ago, shows the direction his thoughts would have taken had he lived to know about man's astounding mastery of the atom, which was the true end of the War and the one event of 1945 that will rubricate that year in world history, for thousands of years to come:

The mind that understands the past will shrink from no vision of the future that imagination can conceive. A few thousand years have opened up the entire field of human knowledge; a few hundred years have 'made us masters where we were slaves.' What, then, is impossible in millions of years? Who knows that the age in which this book appears will not be like a moral Stone Age before the world is twenty lifetimes older?

The mysterious powers of man, the mighty processes of chemistry, the strange promptings of the soul, the throbbing in ethereal space—who shall set a limit to illimitable things like these? Man does not even know if he is alone in the universe. He has no reason to be surprised if tomorrow the mighty atom should suddenly release its power and banish poverty and weariness for human kind. He need not be surprised at anything that radium does, or at any new powers discovered in the ether. He will certainly ring up the other side of the world as readily as he rings up his neighbour, and only the dull folk will be surprised if a dozen things happen as startling as that in the next ten years.

Whilst it would be all too easy for a carping critic to find fault with much that he could quote from *Who Giveth Us the Victory*: to argue that there are inconsistencies which show the author to be no theologian, that he was neither skilled in metaphysics, nor in the philosophy of history (some statements of his on Germany and

Japan will not stand up to analysis today), and so forth; the fact remains that few books written in the confusion of the First World War from the religio-scientific standpoint will better bear re-reading today when the Second World War is ended and humanity is struggling to survive in the appalling wreckage it has left behind. And while in some of its detail his scientific data may require verification, it is broadly sound and luminously presented in language which the 'common reader' (in the Johnsonian phrase) will find stimulating and not less so if he finds it at times provocative. And let us remember that when Arthur Mee wrote this book in 1918 he had still, by his own calculation, a further total of more than 20,000,000 words to write! The Child of Wonder was well on his way to becoming himself one of the wonders of his age!

Through the War years My Magazine was continued at the high level it had attained as a monthly supplement to the Children's Encyclopedia, and as it was in large part written by its editor and reflected his personality in a way which no other magazine had done since the Review of Reviews had lost its founder, W. T. Stead, who went down with the Titanic on April 15, 1912, it must have made a substantial demand upon his time; at least that would have been the case with any ordinary editor. But then Arthur was no ordinary editor. In addition to the tremendous energy he put into his Strength of Britain—an unpaid job, remember—which I estimate as sufficient to have produced another large serial publication, he was writing every week in Lloyd's Newspaper (which could still boast a weekly circulation of a million, the first newspaper in England to reach that figure) a feature called 'A Plain Man's Pulpit.' The title of this article should be noted: it is the first indication of Arthur's lurking desire to have justified in himself the inner significance of his father's sartorial affectation. For over three and a half years he kept up his preachments, and very important these weekly discourses were in determining the next direction of

his editorial work. He was now shaping as a publicist, a leader of thought, a crusader for righteousness.

Up till now he had been essentially a populariser, an unequalled populariser of general knowledge, in which his own ethical purpose was inherent in all that he published but in nowise brought to the readers young and old as an objective of the editor. Henceforth he was to stand up for the good life, for the Christian way of life as he conceived that, and as millions of his compatriots accept it. All through those years the germ of the Children's Newspaper was still there in the form of the Little Paper which was maintained as a supplement to My Magazine after having been rescued alive from the Wonder Box! And the time was approaching when it would undergo a great transformation, with the passing of the War and the coming of that 'brave new world' which was to prove one of the grandest illusions in world history, but to be a time of fine endeavour. The Children's Newspaper which Arthur founded as a weekly on March 22, 1919, was destined to be one of the noblest endeavours of the 'years between the Wars' and one of the worthiest achievements of Arthur Mee's career. It was to be his splendid pulpit whose sounding-board would carry his voice to the ends of the earth and make him a force for good which he had ever longed to be since he discovered the power of his pen. If he had been preaching to a million grown-up readers every week for three and a half years in Lloyd's Newspaper, he was now to address each week a far more important congregation of the empire's future citizens in his own paper which soon attained to a circulation of half a million, and made him the idol of millions of children who as men and women today hold his name in loving remembrance. Few men in the history of journalism have come within sight of his individual achievement or exercised a greater power for good.

XII

'JOURNALIST IN CHIEF TO BRITISH YOUTH'

THIS was the happy description of Arthur Mee in an article which Harold Begbie wrote in *Public Opinion* many years ago. An oft-quoted paragraph from it differs so widely in some essentials from the facts as recorded in my pages that I shall limit my comment to one of his statements which I, from more intimate knowledge of the things that happened, can briefly dispose of. This, because of the duty imposed upon a biographer in assembling the authentic personalia to brush away the dusty legends that gather about anyone who wins his way to fame. Says Begbie: 'The road to fame seemed straight and clear. But of a sudden he threw off all the trammels of grown-up journalism and started the perilous enterprise of a children's newspaper. . . . No writer of our day exercises anything like so great an influence on the next generation.' We may let that pass except for the peril of the enterprise. There was less peril to Arthur's career in it than he faced every day, so far as life and limb were concerned, in crossing Ludgate Circus! For twelve years and more he had been secure in the affections of hundreds of thousands of young readers through his *Children's Encyclopedia* and *My Magazine*, and when he resolved on launching a *newspaper* for children there were a dozen publishers in England and America who would have rushed at him to 'cash in' on that security. Arthur saw nothing perilous in putting his long-cherished scheme to the test. And it is sheer romancing to describe this well-planned project of his in such terms. His own publishers were not in the

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habit of putting their money into 'perilous' projects, and they were fully persuaded Arthur's scheme was a good one, even if they did not realise how good it was.

With its publication Arthur's career can, however, be said to have been confirmed as that of the most successful of all literary caterers for the vast audience of young readers throughout the British Empire—and beyond. Thus Begbie's description of him could not be better. What his admirer did not appreciate was the fact that, while it meant a new turn in his journalistic career, indeed an entirely different objective, it was a natural progression and development of the Arthur Mee that Arthur had been assiduously building up. The call to express his ideal of himself was clear, and the practical Arthur was well equipped for the task. His now well-matured mind saw an opening where other educational publishers were blind, and where, if they had been far-seeing, they had no editor of genius to pioneer.

I have already indicated the sources whence the Children's Newspaper was derived, and need not go back to these again. But here there is a typical Arthurian matter that calls for explanation. Patience, as I have hinted, was not a strongly marked trait of his character. He was not a good traveller, being too anxious to arrive and often, when arrived, itching to move on! Thus he was always planning ahead to do certain things he greatly wanted to do, and would take any means he could devise to hasten the day when he could attain his ends. In this way, if anyone would seek to discover the date when the first Children's Newspaper appeared by calculating back from No. 864, with which it celebrated its silver jubilee, the result would be confusion . . . unless one knew Arthur as well as his biographer did! There are 1,300 weeks in twenty-five years, yet the silver jubilee number of C.N., issued on October 12, 1935, was only 864. How so? Determined to have a thumping fine silver jubilee number as soon as possible, he went back to 1910, when *The Little Paper*

appeared as a regular supplement of his magazine, and included all its numbers in his count-of years for the C.N. Even so, I still find it difficult to account for the deficiency of 436 weekly numbers, unless we allow him to reckon *The Little Paper* (a monthly) in *years* instead of numbers. He was never good at arithmetic; but remembering what I have remarked about his ingenuity in contriving to get the thing he wanted (being like old Lob in his *need* to get it), we may consent to allow him the right he exercised to celebrate the silver jubilee of his beloved C.N. in 1935, although as a stickler for facts I have had to record that the first number of the famous weekly appeared on March 22, 1919. There were times, you will see, when Arthur resembled the young man in a hurry! Meanwhile, I shall ask my readers to be more patient than their favourite editor ever was, and wait a little before I examine the number in question and its more important successor, the thousandth issue of the real *Children's Newspaper*.

It is interesting to put on record the fact that the *Children's Newspaper* was issued at the price of three-halfpence. During the German War of 1914 all penny weeklies had to be doubled in price, but it was hoped that after 1919 they might return to the popular penny: a hope which the economics of publishing failed to justify. As a *new* weekly the *Children's Newspaper* was tried out at the midway increase on the once universal penny, but had eventually to go up to twopence, in common with the others. Like all really well-considered publications, it was running, when the second German War started, with hardly any departure in format from that first number, and only the exigencies of the paper famine and the increased costs of paper and print sent it up to threepence and slightly thinned its bulk before its founder-editor had put his 'press' mark on the last number he was fated to prepare for the printers. From the first number sent out the C.N. was not only a commercial success but a spiritual force which increased from week

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to week with its rising circulation. At one time its sales touched the half-million mark: a figure which had only once before been equalled and exceeded in the U.S.A. by *Youth's Companion*, a famous weekly which differed from it by making no effort to fill the rôle of newspaper.

There is no sort of doubt that notwithstanding all the joys of success which had been his in those glowing years of the whole decade, he was sensible of a profounder pleasure, and also a greater responsibility, when he contemplated himself as monitor of the millions of young readers whom he could now reach in every part of the Empire through the medium of the C.N. For it was from the very beginning a viewspaper as much as a newspaper—possibly more. It made Goodness news by the choice of its items from the world's press, by re-writing and presenting, in a guise which no daily or weekly paper troubled to dress up, news items to attract young readers. And in attracting them to the C.N. he also won the attention of their parents.

Since I began to write this book the name of Arthur Mee chanced to be mentioned in a Club lunch-hour discussion when I was present, and a well-known journalist said that he had been a regular reader of the C.N. since its start, as, apart from the few responsible dailies and some equally few weeklies, it was distinct from all the popular press in assuming that its readers were not quite devoid of intelligence. Arthur would like to have heard that judgement from a fellow journalist. But he never lacked encouragement in the congenial task he had imposed upon himself for the rest of his life, and probably no London editor, not even excepting those of the great daily papers, found his desk each morning laden with more varied correspondence from the far lands of the empire, and certainly none had such outpourings of affectionate confessions from young readers or admiring and encouraging epistles from parents and enthusiasts for social progress.

CHILD OF WONDER

The Children's Newspaper became his teacher's desk, his preacher's pulpit, his reformer's platform, whence all those functions of his mind were exercised to his heart's content and to the enlightenment of a vaster audience—and in point of fact a more important one—than most of the leader-writers in the big papers were addressing. His weekly leading articles and his frequent front-page special contributions were all sure of being read, if only because they had no competing contributions from other writers. The C.N. *was* Arthur Mee! Among his collection of letters that he had probably kept with a view to commenting on them some day, perhaps in an Autobiography, is one from a High School in Hampshire, where his portrait was evidently pinned up amidst a gallery of educational pictures from his publications. One day, according to the letter from one of the women teachers in the infants' school, a little girl of four was very restless and another little girl of the same age rebuked her, saying: 'Look now, there's Arthur Mee looking at you!' The personality of its editor somehow disengaged itself from every issue of his paper and became a living thing in the homes where there were children, and in the schoolroom. It is quite touching, even to one who is no sentimentalist, to go through Arthur's collection of such items stored away for a day that never came to him. A few of these will do more to show the affection in which he was held by his readers than any words of mine.

Here is one from an L.C.C. school inspector:

The only son of one of my colleagues in the L.C.C. inspectorate died suddenly in the playground of Dulwich Prep. School. The little fellow had the Children's Newspaper in his hand and in death he was clutching it tightly. I got this information in the following way. We had been to visit a school and on returning had to occupy wet seats on the top of a bus. I had an old C.N. in my pocket and was spreading it out on the wet seat for my colleague to sit on. 'No,' he said, 'I can't use that paper for that; it was my boy's greatest delight.'

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This is a postcard without name or address of the sender:

In the name of all those whose lives you have touched, whose thoughts you have raised to higher things, and whose hearts you have inspired with a deeper and greater love of all that is good—I thank you, and God bless you.

The following I found among his C.N. gatherings, but although it applies to the Children's Encyclopedia I give it here. It is a letter from a customer of a London firm of distributors and refers to the publication of the second serial issue of the C.E., which came out when My Magazine was still appearing monthly. Dated December 28, 1922, it comes from Kendenup, Western Australia:

Am ordering 'Children's Encyclo.' instead of 'My Magazine'—I cannot afford both so will resume with 'My Magazine' when the Encyclopedia is completed. I would as soon be without a sack of flour in the house to make the family bread as some publication of Arthur Mee's, we value them so highly.

E. THOM.

From Australia came also one of the most charming gifts ever sent across the world to a writing man. It was sent by one of his C.N. readers, Mary Moodie of Kyneton, Victoria, as I learnt from some notes about it and the letter from Mary. No less than a little bag of gold dust, which it had taken her six years to gather from the river there before she had enough to make a nib for a fountain pen! She had begun the task of gathering it when she was six.

Somebody had described the editor of the C.N. as 'M.P. for the next generation,' and I find a letter from W. M. Crook, organising secretary of the Home Counties Liberal Federation, inviting him to stand at the election of 1923, to which Arthur made this happy reply:

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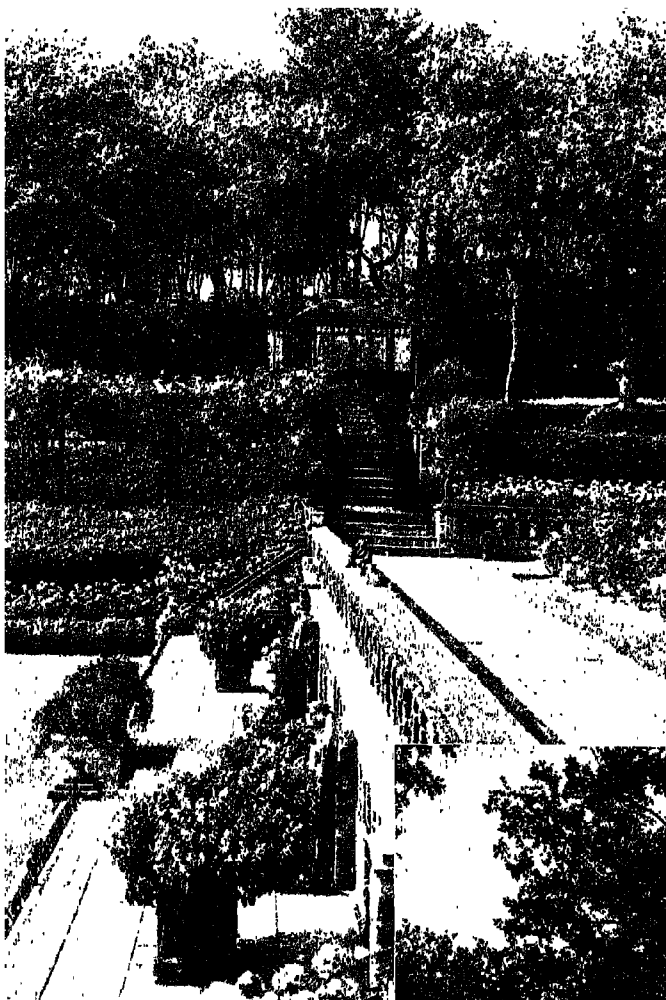
Very many thanks, but I am afraid I am not inclined to give up the important work I am doing for the less important work I could do in Parliament. It is very nice to be asked to stand, but my business is with the next generation, which is going to save the world from the sins and follies and blunderings of this.

Sixteen years later Mr. Crook was at him again with the assurance that he ought to get into the House where he 'would be a most valuable member.' He further ventured to say 'I imagine I see signs of a Liberal revival.' I can find no copy of Arthur's reply to this second invitation, but all the world knows today that the Liberal revival was certainly imaginary. Arthur had the good sense to know his limitations. He was not an Admirable Crichton. He had no great gifts for public-speaking, and none at all for oratory. Once when he yielded to the persuasion of political agents and let himself be billed as the chief attraction at an election meeting in his constituency, he confessed to me that he was terrified to face so large a gathering, although he read a carefully prepared speech. To make his voice carry to the full extent of the large hall in which he spoke, he shouted so loudly that some of the electors who could not gain admission to the hall said they could hear him quite well standing in the street outside!

He knew full well that his instrument was the pen, not the tongue, and wisely kept out of the political arena, though he did from time to time take part in public meetings for the furtherance of any of the social reforms in which he was so sincerely interested, and even so his sincerity was more evident than his oratory. He had to be resolute in refusing the invitations that were showered upon him as editor of the C.N. to take part in public work, else he would have been in danger of impairing the work of his pen. That he had seen happen to other journalists, one a close friend of his, and another who brought a great publishing business to grief through giving up

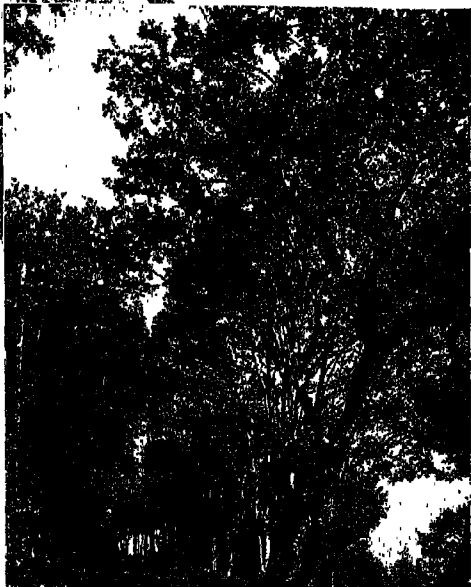


With Arnoldo Mondadori, the Italian publisher of the C.E., on Arthur's right and Sir John Hammerton on his left. Snapshot by Signora Mondadori at Eynsford in June, 1935.



Photos: J. Scott-Dixon

The Summer-house at Eynsford Hill on the edge of the wood, and, insert, a path in the wood.



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too much of his time to public speaking. He was even able to withstand an effort to get him to take a leading part in an important educational conference at Vancouver in 1929, though his reasonable pride in his work for education must have made it hard to refuse. The Minister of Education cabled urging him to accept and offered him a fine opportunity, as the guest of the Government of British Columbia, to travel all over Western Canada as well as to help forward the objects of Canada's National Council of Education. An extract from the letter of invitation will show the high place Arthur held in the estimation of the leading educationists in the Dominion:

When I last saw you in London, I refused to leave without a promise that I might still hope you may yet be with us in April. This hope is very widely shared by people on this side, as I have re-assured myself during the past month or so when visiting the principal cities. Among many others it is shared by the Governor-General, who, I should not be at all surprised, will write you himself, so keen is he. Do, therefore, write me soon and say you are coming! A right warm welcome awaits you, and here are fresh fields in which to walk and new dreams to dream. We want your help badly and believe that you can by your presence here at the Conference, give a lead which will be of tremendous value to future generations, both from the individual point of view and from that of the Empire. So come along, and for once leave that desk of yours and traverse a continent under your own flag until you reach Spring-time on the Pacific. Apropos of all this, the enclosed proof copy of a statement on the Conference may be of some little interest.

If he could decline so flattering an invitation and so alluring a prospect for leaving that desk of his, it was, I little doubt, because of his lack of confidence in himself as a platform figure. Like all men of sensibility, he would attempt nothing in which he could not be sure of bearing himself well and contributing worthily. Ask him for a letter in support of a cause and he would have sent one well worth reading—he may have done so in this instance, though I find no

trace of it among his correspondence—but to face audiences of keen people who would hang upon his words was an ordeal that would rob the prospect of its allure.

As a reply to those who overwhelmed the editor of the C.N. with their requests for co-operation, I find he was driven to prepare a form letter for one of his secretaries to adapt and so to relieve himself of a burden of correspondence which was threatening to eat into the time he required adequately to discharge his ever-pressing editorial and writing commitments. It is an amusing composition, and revealing enough to warrant its reprinting here:

Nothing would please Mr. Mee more than to be of some service to you, but I am sure you will understand that he is entirely overwhelmed by the demands on his energies. Energetic as he is, and for ever working with very little holiday, his life would be impossible and his health would break down if he could not now, after 30 years of very hard work at his papers, save himself from some of the incessant demands on his time.

What these are you will gather from this list of things Mr. Mee has lately been asked to do in one week:

See a man on Peace.

Speak to ten thousand people.

Speak to two thousand people.

Speak to two hundred people.

Help the Empire Marketing Board.

Edit a library of books.

Send books to a cripple home.

Find a motto for Boy Scouts.

Advise about a new magazine.

Help a League of Nations scheme.

Lend somebody £20.

Broadcast.

Make up a speech for children at a public function.

Join a County Council Committee.

Get a free passage from Australia for a lecturer

Send a reader one of the doomed City pigeons.

Send regular supplies of English books to a Dutch school.

Send a series of historical maps, cheap copies of Lear and Othello, and six other things to somebody in Germany.

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I am sure you will wish to save Mr. Mee from the heavy burden of demands such as these, and will believe that it is only because of his great willingness and the difficulty of personally having to say No, that I beg you to accept this letter and his assurance of much goodwill.

His contemporaries were all ready to compliment him on his energy and his thoroughness, and this from J. A. Spender, the famous editor of the Westminster Gazette, which I take from a letter of his among others I have come across in going through Arthur's correspondence, is representative of those compliments from his fellow journalists called forth mainly by his work on the Children's Newspaper. It is dated October 4, 1941:

What a marvel you are! Sometimes in my self-indulgent moments I am tempted to think myself industrious, but compared with you I am a mere sluggard. And all your stuff is good and useful. I can think of no one who is so thorough and painstaking in his studies and knows how to bring the results of them within reach of so many.

Included in the letter files of his C.N. correspondence are not a few marked 'Confidential,' and these I have not asked permission to use in any way, as none of them is vital to my story. In one particular case, however, a very interesting incident may be told without the aid of the letters or any breach of confidence. Arthur was present at a luncheon in honour of a newspaperman who had just completed fifty years in Fleet Street. Amongst those present was Mr. Stanley Baldwin, Prime Minister at that time, who, in the course of an amusing speech, made some gentle thrusts at a notorious contributor to a certain Sunday paper, who collected a princely fee for his weekly screed. The Prime Minister pretended to lament the fact that no editor had ever thought of offering *him* high fees for a thousand words or so on one of the burning topics in which the Sunday paper readers were so deeply interested, or proclaimed in bold type 'Another powerful article by Mr. Baldwin next Sunday!'

As soon as he got back to his desk at the office of the C.N., Arthur wrote to Mr. Baldwin offering him £25 for twenty-five words on any subject he cared to choose! Naturally, there was a very courteous refusal, which Arthur should have foreseen (perhaps he did!), as it is not in accord with parliamentary usage for members of the Cabinet to contribute to newspapers during their term of office. But the offer had been made, and the readers of the C.N. were told about it, which was probably all that its editor had hoped for.

The Silver Jubilee number of the C.N., to which I have referred above, was a brilliant production, running to sixteen pages packed with interesting articles and items, in all of which one could trace the hand of the editor. But the front page of the paper as it appeared differed totally from that which its editor sent to press. He had chosen an effective photograph of Michael Angelo's statue of David against a background of cloud, and overlapping this in the lower part was the famous helmet-crowned head of the egregious Mussolini. His captions were 'Michael Angelo's David broods over Florence: Symbol of Italy's Greatness and the Champion of a Small People,' and 'Mussolini regardless of his country's peace.' This very striking contrast in pictures was accompanied by a forceful denunciation of Italy's evil genius for his attack on Abyssinia. The headings to Arthur's article were searing: 'Judas at the Peace Table'—'Mussolini's March to Loot and Conquest'—'Great War Machine Sweeps Down on a Primitive People.' All very brilliant and all absolutely true, but as England was still at peace with Fascist Italy, all very uncomfortable for our Foreign Office—in a country where there was supposed to be freedom of the press! So the editor's valiance for truth had to give way to counsels of discretion, and Arthur's Silver Jubilee number was marred by having to come out with a less alarming front page, to the lamentation of its editor. He would have printed it had the C.N. been his own property, I have no doubt, and Europe might have been the better for its publishing.

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With the publication of the thousandth weekly number of the Children's Newspaper (May 21, 1938) a four-page supplement was issued containing a special piece of writing by the editor with a typical Arthur Mee heading: 'The Editor's Judgement Day.' (He spelt it without the softening 'e,' but I insist on that.) I know of no other editor who could have used that phrase with all its implications; unless, perhaps, W. T. Stead, to whom, as I have said, in many facets of character Arthur bore some resemblance. Stead's was a more complex personality, with greater depths, wider experience of life, ampler scholarship, but strikingly similar in his sense of 'mission' and responsibility, as also in his undying interest in W. T. Stead.

I am choosing this *apologia pro vita sua* by the editor of the Children's Newspaper for particular consideration, as nothing that he wrote more completely illustrates his merits—and their defects. Not that I propose to subject it to the scalpel of criticism wherewith it would be easy to expose to ridicule much that is expressed in the nine thousand words to which it runs. There are passages in it which show Arthur at his best, and some that made him blush when I once pointed them out to him in a bantering way.

In the first place we are asked to remember that 'to every man comes Judgement Day,' and to imagine that 'In the 1000th week of the C.N. the Editor was summoned to answer for the things he had done, and this is Arthur Mee's Apology to the Power within him for the successes and failures, the dreamings and awakenings, the shortcomings and the realisations of the paper that has touched a multitude of lives throughout the world.' He then proceeds to record the talk that took place that day 'between the Editor and the Power that controls his life.' Being no metaphysician, he wisely makes no attempt to define that Power beyond describing it as 'Power Within Him,' but long before one reaches the end of the remarkable piece of writing one is conscious of a certain confusion between the Power within and the Power without. A matter of no

importance, of course, as the Source is the same, 'that power not ourselves, that makes for rightcousness,' which Matthew Arnold identified with God.

Power Within Him. What have you been doing in the world, Arthur Mee? What of these thousand weeks?

A. M. You wake me from the dream of life, and, alas, it is a striving and a striving and an ending in what you see. In a hard, hard world I have tried to do my best. A man can do so little in a world so vast, with such a multitude of forces and emotions. What is a man against them all?

I do not remember how Arthur explained away the obscurity of the above, but it certainly remains obscure to me even now. He is clearer when he proceeds to record the Power as saying:

I told you to be true. I sent you out into the world to tell the truth to every child. You were to plant within them the seed that should blossom into peace and understanding, into the joy of life, the delight of knowledge, the love of beauty. You were to give them chivalry and good courage, the hope that nothing can vanquish and the faith that nothing can break. I told you to remember the words of Paul:

Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report—if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.

Have you thought on these things?

In his reply to this A. M. asserts:

This world is too much with us. When we would sit and think there is about us the turmoil of the market-place. Everywhere a man is in the grip of Circumstance and cannot do the things he will. It is hard enough for a man to be sure of himself, but harder to be sure of others; and as no man fights alone, without the everlasting power within him, so no man is alone in the conflicting interests about him. He has a hundred duties to fulfil and many masters to obey. . . . And when at last we win a small success, there are the limits of the market-place, of buying and selling, and every dream that is bought and sold loses much.'

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That is well said, but an able journalist who once wrote a very clever interview with Arthur, in which he opined that 'the most uninteresting person to Arthur Mee is Arthur Mee,' could hardly have caught that impression from the thousandth number of C.N. It was his strength and his fascination that, as this article which I am recalling abundantly shows, Arthur Mee was vastly interested in Arthur Mee, and in the wonderful world of romance and reality wherein he never ceased to be surprised at finding himself. 'The Editor's Judgement Day' was written when he was a man of sixty-three, and it rings true to the A. M. of twenty-three, as we shall see on further examination. In some ways it is a testament of youth. Thus he addresses the Power Within:

You sent me out to tell of eternal things, and it is the pleasures of today that men are seeking, the things born in the morning to die in the night. These thousand weeks have changed the world. . . . The great indifferent millions are like a weight upon the world. They see the forces of right and truth and justice weaken, and will not help. They see them perish at last.

Power. Where is the faith I gave you, your belief in mankind, the strength you had, and that invincible optimism that once you said no power could conquer?

A. M. I have tried to put it into my paper. Since we came out with the daffodils a thousand weeks ago, it has been looking about the world for good things, and putting them down.

And so he continues, his rising enthusiasm as he writes being blind to the unfortunate double meaning of the words 'putting them down,' which, of course, meant the printing of them in the C.N. Such phrases as the following are scarcely open to argument, although they would be classed as rhetoric by the critical mind:

We believe that, however much the world changes, the eternal things remain, that what Socrates declared 25 centuries ago men still believe all the world over, that the Sermon on the Mount is the basis of the only

civilisation that can endure, and that the Golden Rule of life is the only way to peace. . . .

And after he registers his admiration for the British way of life, glorying in our flag with all the exuberance of the child who has just learnt what it stands for, he answers thus to Power, who asks 'How many things do you complain of in this land?':

It is the unfathomable mystery of life that in a justice-loving land injustice can endure. We are curiously made. There are kind men who are not hurt to see a pack of dogs tear one poor fox to pieces. There are kind women in Parliament who will not lift a finger to prevent inflammable toys being sold for children. It is better that a millstone should be hung about our necks than that we should offend these little ones, yet this nation that seeks to stop cruelty, this Parliament that seeks to spread justice through the world, these shopkeepers who seek to make an honest living, are willing that a celluloid doll should be sold, though it may burst into flame in front of the fire or in the sunshine, and burn a child to death. I have fought without ceasing against these things and failed. . . .

It was when the Mother of the C.N. (the Children's Encyclopedia) appeared that Benjamin Kidd said it might have more influence on the nation than many Acts of Parliament; and there must surely be a vast multitude whose minds have been shaped or influenced by this paper which, week in week out, year in year out, has been bearing witness to the things that make up the English spirit. I have tried to give back to our children what England has given to me, the things that are woven in the warp and woof of our race.

The English Bible has, more than any other single factor, shaped our life and speech; whether we know it or not it has made us what we are. There is no beauty to compare with it in literature, and there is nothing to compare with the character it has built up in the English-speaking race. We have fallen from grace, but we believe in the moral beauty of Jesus as fervently as we believe in the Flag. We believe in Faith, Hope, and Charity, and in Charity as the greatest of these, and from it comes the toleration and fair play that have been the cornerstones of British government throughout the world. It is the boast of every Englishman that, like Voltaire, he may disagree with every word you say, but he will die for your right to say it. . . . I have tried to take the children behind things as we see them, to let them feel that nothing is empty or dead, but that the

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very stones cry out. We must have failed if those who have been reading this paper do not feel a thrill when they pass Westminster in a bus. To them it is no empty place: it is the shrine of the spirit of our race for a thousand years; it is Chaucer's grave; it is the cradle of Parliaments; it is the temple of the throne of kings; it is Queen Elizabeth's tomb, and Henry the Fifth's, and the place where Cromwell lay; it is the Unknown Warrior's grave, and the place where Sir Walter Raleigh said, 'I have a long journey to take, and I must bid the company farewell.'

Here, perhaps, I should remind the reader that though it is Arthur Mee that is speaking, he is really personifying the Children's Newspaper just as inversely the C.N. could be said to have been A. M., for it was his uniqueness that something of himself, some emanation of his personality, was communicated in everything he did, as well as by everything he wrote. These heroics of his were no mere attitudinising: at their worst, and when they may have seemed inconsistent, they came from his heart and his mind as they were felt and shaped at the moment of expression. Let me illustrate what I mean by his seeming inconsistency:

We are part of all that we have met and all that has yet been. We belong to some immortal mystery that no man knows. I have seen a bare hilltop that in these thousand weeks has grown into the very gate of heaven; and so life has been all the way, a building-up into what we see and what we are.

There is truth and observation in that. It goes oddly with his emphatic acceptance of the verities, but it is entirely characteristic of him that he lumps the little with the great, the tremendous with the trivial, in accounting to Power for his conduct of the Children's Newspaper:

I hope we have taught our lesson well, and have not altogether failed. I have much sympathy with those who think we are not perfect and write to tell us when we slip, but I remember the lonely people at the ends of the earth who wait for our coming to them every week, and their

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letters are often more than gold. Hundreds of times they are not to be read without tears. I remember the Dane who wrote that he could not help loving this country after reading this paper. I remember the letter of a great man known to all the world, whose mother, as she lay dying, begged that he would send the C.N. every week to a working family she knew. I remember that it was the last paper mentioned by Sir Ernest Shackleton as he left London on the journey from which there was no return. I remember that Sir Ian Hamilton thought its story of Gallipoli almost the best he had read, and that it was something in our columns which moved a rich American to come to the aid of Amundsen. . . . I think there are a myriad hearts about the world a little kinder for the things that we have said. Never shall I forget the morning when my door opened and a man walked in and said:

'I left prison yesterday after being there 18 months. They gave me a pound, and I bought my ticket to London to come to see you. Every Thursday morning they gave the C.N. to every prisoner in the Isle of Man. I have read it every week from cover to cover, and it has made me a new man. I have come to tell you that I am going straight.'

He has gone straight; after three times in prison he is my friend and an honest man. It is something. It is some consolation that the printed word has power to save a soul that was all but lost.

He takes credit for advocating better design in petrol pumps, for crusading against the 'litter lout' who disfigured our countryside with waste paper in pre-war days, for abolishing in all his publications the senseless use of the full stop at the end of chapter headings, and such minuscular matters, but he was so sensitive to beauty and orderliness in all things that these smaller things jostled the larger ones in his mind. I remember his coming to visit me at Highgate quite forty years ago and making a mock face at my entrance gate, where I had gone out to greet him, because the lettering thereon had two unnecessary full stops (not of my placing), 'Oh, Sandy, I'm afraid we shall have to go round to your back door, we could never come in here against those two full stops.' He had the charming gift of laughing at his own little fads, such as the need for the Government to provide public microscopes and telescopes (imagine the queues for peeps!), to introduce the common folk to the marvels of

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the minute and the wonders of the immensely large in nature! And from these, with a lament for the lost scent of musk and the lessened sweetness of sugar (both of which he declares happened about the time of the First World War!), he moves on to consider power politics:

To those who can remember for a generation the state of Europe is like an evil dream. Only the other day the world was on a rock; now it is on a volcano. Who would have believed that it was possible for a Napoleon to stride to power again? Yet we have not one but three in Europe, with hundreds of millions of lives in their grip and nations walking afraid.

Power. And yet a thousand weeks ago you were masters of the world, your country, your ideals. You had won the war, and the future was yours. These nations that terrify you now, where were they then? Why is it that the beggar at the door has become the master of the world?

A. M. Alas, it is injustice that has made it so. The winners of the war have lost the Peace. Four Unknown Warriors lie in famous tombs in their country's capitals, but Four Known Men have much to answer for. In the spirit of war they made a peace that was no peace. . . . It is easy to see it now, and some have seen it long, but the powers that have grown from the little seed of justice are just no more. The world is in the grip of war again. Our Peace has failed, and Hope is as our great artist painted her, sitting on the top of the world straining faint music from her harp's last broken string.

The last words in his imaginary colloquy he gives to the Power Within Him:

If Christianity has not succeeded in nearly 2,000 years, is your heart broken that the League of Nations has not succeeded in these thousand weeks? Be strong, and of good courage. Quit you like men. Out into the world again. Tell these young people who never yet have seen the world at peace that all will be well with the Old Land, that justice, truth, and liberty have never yet been beaten in the world, and that it is still true, as through the ages, that

*Behind the dim unknown
Standeth God within the shadow,
Keeping watch above His own.*

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A striking document this, look at it as you will. Everything of Arthur Mee is to be found in it. His faith in God, his puzzlement before the mystery of life, his love of 'all things bright and beautiful,' his dramatising of his own personality, his fine fluency of language, and his lapses from clarity in some of his more resounding passages where his words overcome his thought, but through it all a shining love of his fellow men, the joy of service, the delight of being alive. Five years later, almost to the day, that life he lived so strenuously and to such good purpose had reached its end.

While it was too much to expect that the Children's Newspaper could continue with all its old verve after the withdrawal of its pervading personality, it has been conducted with a devoted remembrance of its founder by Mr. Hugo Tyerman, who was Arthur Mee's assistant editor from the beginning, and it is still doing good service to the causes which Arthur had so much at heart. It would be pleasant to think that it may long continue to bear upon its front page the words 'Founded by Arthur Mee.'

XIII

AUTHOR AND MAKER OF BOOKS

WE come now to consider Arthur as a writer and maker of books. I have given this heading to the present chapter for what I consider a proper reason. In taking a view of his literary output the very multiplicity of his interests makes criticism difficult without entering into the examination of much that would be of little profit from a strictly literary point of view, and I could wish to avoid sweeping generalisations which might not be acceptable without modifications in detail. Nothing that I have said of him as a writer leaves me with any *arrière pensée*, as I have been careful to make most of my opinions hinge upon specific points, but to be asked outright 'What was the real merit of Arthur Mee as a writer?' I can but answer, as I have already endeavoured to convey, 'The inspirational value of everything he wrote.' As an author his work was somewhat above the standard of good journalism while lacking that indefinable something which would have made it lasting literature. As a maker of books there are no sort of reservations: here his talent in the craft of letters almost amounts to genius, even when its basic quality lies in journalism. In many of his individual books, as in all his large compilations, he visualised the finished volumes as entities complete with their illustrations before he set about the writing or the selecting of their contents. The physical presentation of any of his books was always very clear in his mind's eye before he began upon its production.

Almost coincident with the starting of the Children's Newspaper he began a new and distinct, though closely related career as an

author, a career which he had less foreseen than discovered, thanks to that capacity for adapting himself to new and unexpected situations. The streams of his literary activity each took its rise from an earlier current and in the end all tended to become confluent of one river of energy. For all his romantic talk about 'the Book of My Heart,' which he had come to consider the Children's Encyclopedia, and the avowed determination to make the Children's Newspaper, when it had attained to great things, 'My Monument,' I am inclined to the opinion that at the end he was most of all fascinated by the success of his personal books. The sheer wonder of that, so much more personal, so individual by comparison with the great things he had edited, unquestionably appealed to his admiration for the Arthur Mee of his fancy that it is not surprising if in them he thought he had 'found himself.' And yet the astonishing story of Arthur Mee and his books would not have had to be told were it not that all his other achievements preceded it. My figurative description of how each of the streams of energy marked the course of his years can be taken literally. Out of his early journalism ran the Self-Educator, from which the Children's Encyclopedia issued, and out of that flowed My Magazine and Children's Newspaper, whilst nearly all his books from 1917 to 1943, with the exception only of The King's England series, were side issues of My Magazine and Children's Newspaper—more than forty of them! The mass of his output was only possible by the double use of his writings in his monthly or weekly periodicals and in his books, where the original matter underwent so much revision and extension that he had good reason for counting both uses of it separately.

If, then, we were to judge the individual books of Arthur Mee from the strictly literary point of view, to attempt an appreciation of him as a man of letters, a scholar in literature, the approach would be different from that I am making here. I have no reason for thinking that any large part of his own studies was applied to the art of

criticism, to probing the secrets of our classic essayists, the methods of those who consciously sought after a polished style of expressing their thoughts, or those others with few thoughts to express though furnished with a studied medium for their presentation. His reading in *belles lettres* was not extensive, he was mostly given to the quest of ideas. But he roamed at large amongst the English poets, not always with a keenly critical eye or ear for assonance, for the loveliness of words fragrant with uncommon beauty of sound and 'picture' value. Words to be of merit in his estimation must not 'half-conceal the soul within,' but should stand for what they were popularly supposed to stand. And that was his manner of writing, for one rarely comes upon a sentence in any of his numerous books which leaves the reader in a moment of doubt as to what its writer meant.

A long acquaintance with the miscellaneous writers for boys and girls, as distinct from the story-tellers, with the exceptions of Miss C. M. Yonge's *Book of Golden Deeds*, and some of Ascot Hope's, I can compare but one with Arthur Mee, and then only in respect to fecundity of production. A veritable prince of Grub Street was a favourite of mine: W. H. Davenport Adams, who in a lifetime less than Arthur's by five years produced no fewer than one hundred and forty books of an informative kind in miscellaneous literature, and did much to instruct the youth of his day at a time when school education was more circumscribed than through all the years of Arthur's life. But none of those who catered for youth in the latter half of the nineteenth century allowed any essence of themselves as individuals to come through their writings, possibly because they adhered to a stricter technique of writing and presentation. In fact the books of Arthur Mee are so far removed from the old idea of 'prize books' that they cannot be compared with any of those with which in his own boyhood he was familiar. None of the writers for boys and girls who preceded him had the gift of writing or compiling books which were as eagerly sought after by fathers and mothers

as by the young folk, who discovered in them not a professional author addressing the young, but a young man addressing the world. That was the prime factor of his wide appeal to the general reading public, and it is better seen in his individual books than in the larger works of his editing with which his name first became famous.

By selecting for particular notice a few only of the many 'Books by Arthur Mee' that for over twenty years were a Christmas feature of the bookshops, I shall hope to give a general notion of their merits and suggest some of the reasons for their exceptional popularity. I have already dealt at some length with what I regard as his first important individual book, *Who Giveth Us the Victory*, with which I consider the tale of his book-work really begins. Unlike most of the long list that follows it, this book, and the others of lesser importance that he wrote in furtherance of his *Strength of Britain Movement*, had no sort of appeal to children, but when he published *Little Treasure Island* in 1920 he had hit upon a style of literature which had the dual merit of attracting both the young and the old, and was soon to account for that annual welcome which greeted 'the latest Arthur Mee.'

In accord with his early resolve to 'insist upon himself,' many of these books of his were now titled 'Arthur Mee's Book of ——' *This or That*. His name had come to be a sure selling agent no matter what the subject-matter might be. *Little Treasure Island* was a delightful description of his native land seen through eyes of wonder and, in a way, an earnest of that deep love of it which led him sixteen years later to embark upon the last of his monumental works, *The King's England*. His *Hero Book* (1921) was the first of his hero-worshipping kind to which he returned from time to time, and *Arthur Mee's Golden Year* (1922) was a happy idea skilfully carried out. The last named might be quoted against my opinion that he was not at his happiest as a writer of travel, but I still adhere to that after all the charm I have found in this particular book on a new

reading of it. His Golden Year was 'a year' only in fancy. It may have comprised some 360 days, but these represented the sum total of his holiday travels over fifteen or sixteen years! The emotions of travel recollected in tranquillity, as it were; seen again through the golden light of fond memory.

In vain will you search the book-lists of the standard authors and the writers of today for any comparable travel book. See how he uses his not very wide experience of travel: eighteen thrilling chapters which range from France, Switzerland, Italy, to Egypt, with all the thrill of new discoveries though written many years after they were experienced. Note how unerringly his mind seizes the vital things of human interest and ignores all other things that might tire the reader had he tried to make them live again. Italy is brilliantly and truly described as 'the Treasure House of the World,' Milan suggests the chapter 'Where Borromeo Sleeps,' Rome 'the Shadows of the Caesars,' Pompeii 'the City that Passed in the Night,' Paris 'the City of Beautiful Things,' Biban-el-Muluk 'the Sleeping Kings,' and so forth. Entertainment and instruction go hand in hand. The whole book is pervaded by the joy of having seen these historic places: the Child of Wonder telling the world how wonderful it is. The sort of book which no one to whom those things had become commonplace could possibly have written, and in every way it lives up to the promise of his introduction:

Here we will let imagination work; we will roam among the great sights of the world. This is no guide book. It is a picture of things that a busy man has seen when he has found the courage and the time to say Good-bye to Little Treasure Island, and to run over the hills and far away. It is a note-book of three hundred and fifty wander-days about the world, and what a traveller saw in them. It is a look-back to happy days and far-off things; it is the memory of a Golden Year.

That preface is dated 'Lilac-time' from 'The Gazebo on a Kentish Hilltop.' Arthur Mee's Golden Year, it will thus be seen, was no

conventional travel book, but it was a thing of delight to every boy and girl who read it when it came out in 1922 and to all who have made acquaintance with it in any of its subsequent editions. Though it cannot be classed with the travel books of R. L. S. as a contribution to English literature, it has a vitality all its own and will communicate both pleasure and instruction to thousands of readers, young or old, for years to come.

The Children's Bible was a great departure in 1924; a noteworthy and courageous undertaking which has since had the compliment of imitation by one of the University presses. I am not favourably disposed to bowdlerising, but must admit that the task of going through the whole of the Scriptures and omitting therefrom such passages as most parents would prefer their children not to read until they were nearing manhood and womanhood could not have been better done. That is, of course, granting the need for its doing. His genius for editing is seen here to admiration, for he contrived to produce a version into which no word of the editor had been interpolated and no word of the original which called for modifying retained. The wisdom of attempting so venturesome and so laborious an undertaking had its reward in the immediate and sustained demand for his Children's Bible. Indeed, its success gave birth to the Children's Life of Jesus, the Children's Shakespeare, and the Children's Bunyan, all which appeared within the ensuing five years, during which he wrote or compiled another half-dozen books as well!

One could find something interesting to say about almost every one of these books, produced sometimes at the rate of two or three in one year. Not one of them failed to find a large body of readers, and nothing but the need to push on with my story is my reason for passing over many of them without comment. In number they are so many that their mere enumeration suggests the output of a literary syndicate, not the outflow of one man's diversified mind;

but read them all—as possibly none but the present writer has done by way of a continuous study—or choose a number of them at random, and you will find the steady flame of one mind illumines them throughout. I shall not examine in any detail such series of lesser, but still significant writings as Talks to Boys and Talks to Girls, for years on end familiar objects of the bookshops, where they sold as rapidly as some of the most popular magazines in an age when magazines were more popular than today. To do so would result in losing sight of the wood by nearness to the trees.

But there is one series of little booklets which, for a few years before the coming of the Second World War, was selling in thousands and had placed their author in the very forefront of modern pamphleteers, just ahead of that new age of pamphleteering which the War was to usher in. The series I have in mind is that known as Arthur Mee's Rainbow Books. In form and content they are peculiarly Arthur Mee. Each consists of thirty-two duodecimo pages, charmingly printed and bound in tasteful paper boards, with a rainbow flashing across the top left corner, all which I feel sure was the choice of the author's fancy. The five or six thousand words of letterpress that comprised each little book conveyed to the children, who could not fail to be attracted by them, the authentic accents of their author's voice. The very titles of this series indicate the mint whence they came: *Good Morning Young England*, *Life Calls to Youth*, *The Broken Dream of Wilbur Wright*, *Little Brother Ishi*, to mention but four of the set of eight. From these I shall select the two last named for special consideration; one as it is concerned with a personal adventure shared by us both, the other because it illustrates his genius for making an anthropological experiment on the other side of the Atlantic, which he had only read about, to glow with life.

Some time in the late summer of 1918, it happened that Arthur and I had arranged with Handley Page to be invited to make an ascent

in one of the big bomber planes which his firm was constructing for the bombing of Berlin. These were the largest flying machines which had yet been put into production, but today they would look very ordinary alongside a Super-Fort or a Lancaster. Although the design, equipment, and power potential of the Handley Page giants were all very 'hush hush,' it is reasonable to suppose the Germans were not without knowledge of this threat developing to the safety of Berlin: a threat that might well have helped towards the shortening of the War as much as the existence of a squadron. At all events, these war planes were never put to the use for which they had been designed; indeed it was not until four days after Armistice Day (November 15, to be precise, not the 25th, as Arthur wrongly states) that we received the long-promised invitation to take part in a trial trip early that afternoon. On a typically dull November day, we hastened to Cricklewood Aerodrome by car, and as we had been told that there would be room for more if we each cared to bring a friend, his associate editor Miss Margaret Lillie, and my editorial secretary, who were both keen on the possibility of making their initial flights, were quick to seize this chance.

The occasion was to prove historic, for it was the first time in the history of flying that so many as forty persons in addition to the pilot had been taken up to 6,500 ft. in an aeroplane. Slightly disconcerting were the preliminaries. We had arrived soon after noon at Cricklewood to find that the plane had not yet been given over by the mechanics to the pilot (an American airman named Prodger, who only a few months later met his death by accident), and that it would have to make a test flight before the assembled company could be stowed into it. Some three hours passed in effecting this and other precautions, which included the weighing of the forty persons who were offering themselves as so much human ballast for this trial flight. Each one of us also had to sign a document by which we exonerated the Handley Page firm from all responsibility in the

event of any accident to the person or disaster to the plane: a necessary measure at a time when such occurrences were relatively more common than they are today. But as everybody was excited (to which excitement the long delay had somewhat contributed) the whole company was only too anxious to relieve Handley Page of every shred of responsibility, provided we could only get aboard the plane and away into the grey and darkening November sky.

To most of those who were going up, it was their first experience of aerial ascent. Personally I had made several flights to France, one indeed only a week or ten days before, and as I knew that Arthur had a horror of heights, I was rather curious to see how he stood up to this test. He showed no sort of timidity or fear as we stood there looking down through wide apertures in the floor of the fuselage, the whole interior of the plane being void of fittings or any devices for the comfort of passengers. The thrill of watching the familiar scenes of London, such as Hyde Park, St. James's, with the Mall and Buckingham Palace as landmarks, unrolling beneath our feet far below in a sort of architectural design for a great city, banished all sense of fear; even the whisper that we were not keeping to the trial route as planned did not disturb our equanimity as we soared above the clouds and became lost to the observers at Cricklewood, so that, in the gathering dusk, they set up flares to guide our pilot home with his record load of human freightage.

Now this unforgettable experience is described by Arthur as the second of two episodes which make up *The Broken Dream of Wilbur Wright*. I have related it first from memory, and will now endeavour to illustrate the art with which Arthur turned it, another and earlier experience, and a reading of history, into a miniature but effective piece of moralising. 'The great tragedy of the world began with a laugh. Half comedy, half tragedy, is the life of man.' That is how he starts by telling of the laughter which greeted Lord Northcliffe's offer of £10,000 to the first airman who could fly from

London to Manchester. 'One of our clever evening papers followed with the offer of a million to the first man to fly to the moon.' And by the way, I notice that Arthur, who was never given to understatement, mentions that he had heard a clever scientist say it was quite easy for man to fly: 'he had only to wave his arms about for a thousand years.' Evolution is a much slower process than that. I heard the same scientist (he was Sir J. Arthur Thomson), but he postulated at least 30,000 years, during which men were to run along the seashore waving their arms as in the act of flying before they would develop muscles and wings like pterodactyls. A thousand years is little more than one day in the process of evolution!

But with that intense interest in the *genius loci*, which was always so strong in him, especially if the place was one where he was located, and which enabled him to make the most surprising discoveries, he forthwith takes up a page or two with the forgotten exploits of Percy Pilcher of Eynsford, who had solved the problem of flight with his gliders 'long before the world had heard of Wilbur Wright' and came to his end on a flight in 1899. 'He was 34, and he was the English pioneer of flight.' Wherever a forgotten Englishman had done something for which his memory should have been kept green, Arthur Mee delighted to remember him, and here was a hero from his own adopted village in Kent.

Then in September 1908 came the gr̃eat experience of which he makes such excellent use in this little book: his going with Northcliffe to Pau to witness the first European triumph of Wilbur and Orville Wright against the background of the Pyrenees. He wrote me almost daily about the exciting events in which he was participating away in that lovely valley of South-Western France, but not one of these amusing letters have I preserved.

He was in good company: Arthur Balfour, Charles Rolls 'thinking out the finest motor-car on earth as he watched this strange thing mounting to the sky,' Katharine Furse, King Alfonso of Spain,

and various others. Arthur was one of the dozen people who helped to pull the ropes which launched the rather ramshackle-looking contraption of the Wrights into the air, on the first successful flight of a heavier-than-air machine in Europe. Nearly five years before that the Wrights had solved the problem in their native America, but not until their flights at Pau and Le Mans did Europe and the world at large awaken to the fact that the Air Age had become an accomplished fact.

Away he flies, on and on. The great machine becomes a thing of grace and beauty. It curves this way and that; it rises high and falls low; it goes straight and spins round; it dips and bends like the wings of a bird; it flies to the hills until it looks in the distance like a motor-car dashing along the snow-covered ridges of the Pyrenees. It flies at forty miles an hour over the tree-tops until it has gone from sight, and then, after ten minutes, the man-bird comes back, racing a bird that flies beside him, and comes straight over our heads. . . . The end of it was amazing, beyond belief. This great thing that had grown beautiful before our eyes came down from the skies and rested gently on the ground without a tremor or a jolt. It was a thrilling and splendid and historic thing.

Particularly interesting today is Arthur's account of what Wilbur Wright thought about the future of flying after five years of experiment:

I asked Wilbur Wright what he thought would happen to the plane—whether it would come to be like a train some day and carry many people, or whether it must remain a small thing and carry one or two? He thought it would always be small, never carrying more than one or two. I asked him what would be the use of so great a thing as this, so costly, so difficult to house, if it could take up only one man. Lord Balfour was listening, and before the flying man could answer, the statesman's wit prompted him to give his own version of the benefit of flying in two words. 'Solitary bliss,' said Lord Balfour. As for Wilbur Wright, he thought that the aeroplane, though it would remain a small thing, would be a great instrument for Peace by quickening up communication and bringing together more closely the peoples of the world. He would have

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had no pleasure in inventing it unless he thought it would help to abolish war. . . .

*O land of Now, O land of Then,
Dear God, the dreams, the dreams of men.*

With the memory of this enviable experience still clear in his mind and the rôle of the aeroplane in the First Great War to belie his fondest hopes, he goes on to demand of all men of good intent:

Is it a wild dream to ask that at least the air shall be free from the fiend of war, that the songs of birds shall not give place to the noise of cannon, that the sun that gives us life shall not be hid by aerial processions of engines of death?

That is a terrifying picture, which makes us shudder as we think of the future we are making now for our children; and it is no fantastic twisting of imagination. But if it is within the power of man to make it true, it is within his power, also, to make it false. There is a science of humanity as well as a science of machinery. Shall it be said in fifty years that the statesmanship of this scientific age let slip from its hands the power of directing a new science in its infancy, and, instead of checking the area of human misery, allowed the supreme terror of mankind to rage free on land and sea and in the very heavens? Is there not a science of sciences, holding the world and mankind and science itself in trust for all the ages?

And is there no voice in this higher science to say that the genius of mankind shall not for ever be sold to War Offices and Admiralties and turned against mankind and our children; but that this new triumph of man shall become a step, not downward in the devastation of the race, but upward in the world's ascent to that

*One far-off divine event,
To which the whole creation moves?*

And then he relates the episode at Cricklewood, on which I have already enlarged, and in a spirit almost of despair concludes his homily thus:

One hope alone the whole world has, the hope that lies in the universal dread of this foul thing. The world is filled with fear. No land is free from

the assassin's bomb. If it should fall in Paris or in London, the life we know is at an end. More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of, and we must pray that the madness of the nations will pass, that decency will come into the world again, and that faith, hope, and charity, these three, will return to the hearts of men.

Arthur might have seen his faith in prayer put to its severest test had he lived into the post-war days when his biographer is reviewing this remarkable little book of his, eight years after it was written, and wondering how he would have reacted to the later horrors of the flying bombs, the rockets, and the atomic bomb, which piled up swiftly in the two years following his death, with a new crescendo of abomination which even his imaginative mind had not discerned among the shape of the things to come. One thing is certain; even in his despair at the follies of mankind he would still have stood firm as a lifelong advocate of peace and faced this strange new world more resolutely than ever in denouncing all the madness of war. The dream of Wilbur Wright had been broken in the First Great War; has the Second by its unprincipled terrorism from the air prepared the way, through universal suffering, for its eventual realisation?

Little Brother Ishi is one of the many pleasing small things that Arthur could throw off as easily as any good journalist would have written a brief account of the facts; but Arthur, who was so much more than a good journalist, invests the facts, as he ascertained them direct from 'that good man of California University, Professor Waterman,' with a mingling of romance, human interest, and spiritual vision that makes his short narrative of one of the last of the Yahi Indians a gem of popular writing. Ishi was captured in 1911 by some prospectors in Deer Creek, California, when he was 57 years old and had never in his life seen a white man! How he was taken in hand by Professor Waterman and by kindness and skill brought out of the darkness of primitive man into correspondence with the

environment of a highly civilised life is a romance of anthropology before which such stuff as 'Tarzan of the Apes' stands revealed for the crude, unscientific imagining it is. Arthur begins his little story-study of Ishi by saying 'Out of the Stone Age into Civilisation there burst one day a man who made fire with flints and talked a language nobody knew. He was like an apparition from an unknown world.' And he links the story of this primitive survival, Ishi, with those of the better-known stories of Pocahontas, Lee Boo, and Donald Glass, to give point to his thesis thus submitted:

Civilisation, it would seem, is too much for the simple folk of far-off lonely places. It gives us something to think about. These people were very like us. Ishi, Lee Boo, Pocahontas, Donald Glass, were all at home with civilised folk. The differences among men are as nothing compared with the likeness between them.

Straight from the Stone Age steps Ishi. He comes among Twentieth Century people with his spear and his bow, naked and wild and free, with a mind that has never bent itself to any problem more difficult than trapping a deer. What was likely to happen to a man like that, set down in the heart of a city?

What happened was that Ishi settled down very well, and very cleverly picked up such small things as the use of a knife and fork. He enjoyed the life about him, and in all great matters he proved himself not merely a ready student, but a pattern and example. He taught us that all men, white or red or yellow or brown or black as ink, are much alike in the depths of their beings. If the world had known that, there would have been no wars; until the world understands it well, there can be no peace.

We are children of one Father, and Ishi was our little brother.

Two years before he had written those little Rainbow Books, he had begun in 1936 a large new enterprise with which, in the coming years, his name will be as prominently associated as with the Children's Encyclopedia. Here I must give an account of how it came into being, a story which has never been told and, from a biographer's point of view, one that asks to be told. A marked charac-

teristic, already noted, was Arthur's readiness to make quick decisions, to go ahead forthwith on the lines decided. And if, as sometimes happened, when well advanced with his new scheme, he found it was not working out to his satisfaction, he would be as quick to abandon it as he had been to begin it. I have often seen in journalism men of lesser imagination stick resolutely to the carrying out of some project which they had started with too little consideration and stagger blindly on to failure, when they should have scrapped their work halfway and begun it anew. Not so Arthur—in his earlier years at least, though on one or two occasions when he had really gone too far to turn back, he had to be content with results which, from his point of view, could only be regarded as failure. But when I use that term in connection with any enterprise of his it must be taken as relative; there was always an original idea at the core of everything attempted or achieved, and what he would have deemed a failure and might have lengthened the faces of his publishers, others might well have looked upon as a success. Moreover, he had that counter-vailing quality which not merely refuses to accept defeat, but is capable of turning a threatened loss to profit. The outstanding instance of this I shall now disclose.

Against my advice, he laboured for years to produce a vast descriptive and pictorial survey of the British Isles, a new Domesday Book of the Motherland, to be first issued in fortnightly parts. The only way in which it was found practicable to make this a homogeneous work was by dealing with the topography county by county, which meant that while subscribers in Aberdeenshire or Argyllshire, Buckinghamshire or Berkshire, might feel a quickening of interest, those in Warwickshire and Worcestershire would not be easily reconciled to the prospect of waiting for two years or so before they could read about the towns and villages to which their thoughts first turned. And when the opening number of the proposed work was eventually in type and some specimen copies

printed, this defect from the public's point of view was all too apparent. Thus, and rightly I think, for I advised against its publication, the whole enterprise was vetoed. Was Arthur defeated? Oh dear no! He accepted the situation, and at once began to plan his beloved project afresh. And so was born one of his finest achievements, none other than that famous series of books *The King's England*!

No comparable set of books on the history and topography of England has ever been produced. Had its editor nothing else to his credit, *The King's England* would have been a worthy memorial, albeit no more than one of a dozen literary achievements of which at least two rivalled it as a publishing enterprise. Up to the outbreak of the Second World War, no fewer than thirty-six of the forty volumes comprising the series had been issued by Messrs. Hodder & Stoughton, the publishers who had given to the world all his books, with but one exception, for a quarter of a century. So popular had the series grown before then that only the shortage of paper, which became increasingly acute during the War years, prevented the sales of *The King's England* from mounting to unprecedented heights for books of the same class. But that phrase is hardly correct: there were no 'books of the same class'; these stand apart from the ruck of general literature of the guide-book and travel category, with which their editor never had any intention to compete. Although he was assisted by a group of colleagues in travelling half-a-million miles (as he puts it) throughout the country, visiting some ten thousand towns and villages to gather the data for his new *Domesday Book*, every volume of the series bears the impress of the master hand that planned and welded into a harmonious whole the immense body of material so collected. This unique and delightful series, which will be reprinted for many years to come, when the very names of most of the best-selling contemporary novels, together with those of their authors, will have been forgotten, was

Arthur Mee's way of attaining success where only failure had threatened.

When looking through some of the letters which he had received in 1942, I came upon one from Sir Norman Birkett, and this, better than any appreciation that I could offer of this particular work, will illustrate its appeal to the intelligent reader. Sir Norman's letter was written from the Judges' Residence at Leeds on March 19, 1942, and it illustrates how an eminent English man of affairs, who can have but little time for writing, aside from his professional pre-occupations (his letter is in his own hand), could be so moved by admiration as to express himself in this gracious manner:

Dear Arthur Mee,

You might be interested in an event which befell me last Saturday.

I addressed the York Medical Society, and at the conclusion of the meeting I was presented with an inscribed copy of your 'Yorkshire' in the King's England series.

I have read it with unalloyed pleasure, and having visited York Minster and the beauties of York whilst there, found your book fascinating.

I find I never get too old to experience pleasure when people say words of encouragement or appreciation: and I felt impelled to send this word to you as a Great Master of your craft.

My brother Judge has decided to possess the whole series, so greatly was he taken with my Book.

Kindest regards,

Yours most sincerely,

NORMAN BIRKETT.

Here, too, I would suggest we have a clue to the secret of Arthur's world-wide appeal as an editor and writer: the sterling humanity of the man. He was the reverse from introspective in every act and deed of his life. The common interests of humanity were the abiding inspiration of his writing and of all his editorial activity. In all the years of our intimacy we seldom disclosed the secret places of our hearts and were at one in our dislike of the latter-day school of

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would-be philosophic writers who search their inner selves, and particularly their 'innards,' for a view of life, while all around their ordinary and extraordinary fellow creatures are responding to their environment as haply they have been since the dawn of earthly life. The healthy mind finds life worth living despite a world of worries, for it can look at a myriad other things than daffodils 'with a child's first pleasure.' This was eminently true of Arthur Mee. That was the reason why he was no less successful in holding his vast following of young readers than in securing the sympathetic attention of the adult and the aged.

XIV

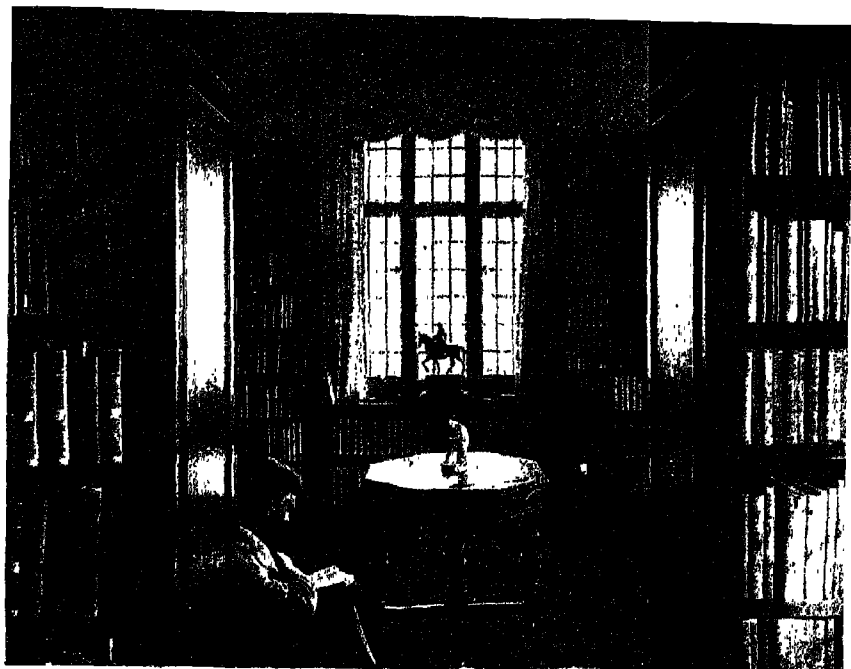
HIS YEAR OF JUBILEE

THERE were many who knew him personally in 1941 who heard with surprise that Arthur Mee was celebrating his jubilee in journalism. He still appeared to them so youthful in every way that it seemed incredible that for fifty years he had been writing and editing newspapers, magazines, books, and works of encyclopedic dimensions—all that impressive tale of work we have told—and still retained the vigour and enthusiasm of one looking forward eagerly to increase of achievement. To those who knew him only through his writings and the publications of his editing, it was no less matter for surprise, as the spirit of youth emanated from every page that left his hand, and nowhere was there a hint of the old man, or even the ageing man. Youth of mind and body seemed to exhale from everything that bore his touch. And here he was admitting to fifty laborious and fruitful years in his chosen field of work! The clue to his early year of jubilee was, of course, his early start.

There were numerous press references at the time to 'Arthur Mee the Peter Pan of Journalism.' All well-meant, but wrongly applied. Peter Pan may exist in the popular imagination as 'the boy who wouldn't grow up,' but the real success of Barrie's delightful fantasy lies entirely outside its eponymous hero, who in the estimation of most healthy youngsters exhibits more traces of a 'Sissy' than of a virile young male. We must accept Peter Pan as a thing of elf-land or reject him wholly. Judged by ordinary human standards, the famous Frampton statue in Kensington Gardens is that of a girl-boy. Arthur Mee was nothing of that kind. His was no case of arrested

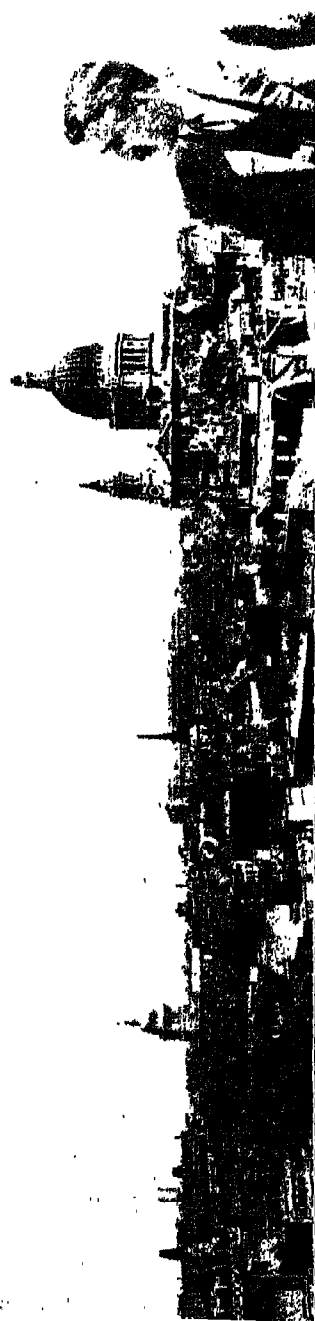
development. Mentally he was growing up all the days of his life, but at the same time retained his capacity for wonder undiminished to the end: his open-eyed vision of life, his interest in his fellow creatures, his essentially adult sympathy with those who were suffering, down-trodden, struggling against an adverse fate, his own unquenched love of living: in a word, his sterling humanity.

Arthur, as we have seen, may have been shy enough as boy and adolescent, but excess or pretence of shyness was never a fault of his from youth to his days' end. He was so naturally himself that, though never forward or aggressive in company, he had little respect for those sons of genius who pretend a meek humility which is merely a disguise for inner conceit. Arthur saw himself, not as a wonder of body and brain for private study and public exploitation, but as a dramatic figure about which he could write with a certain detachment and with a complete lack of self-consciousness. He was so innocently impressed with the magnitude of the work he had been able to perform, so sure of its importance to his generation, that he rejoiced to contemplate it, and when, on October 11, 1941, he devoted no fewer than four full pages of the Children's Newspaper to 'Arthur Mee's Jubilee,' I doubt if any one of his readers regarded him for a moment as an editor blowing his own trumpet. He was just being true to himself after fifty years of wonderful achievement. He would show you his latest piece of work with the same pride that a boy would show you the tool-box he had made, a wireless set he had put together, a picture he had painted, or as every little girl asks you to admire her new dress. What in other men would have been properly written down as sheer self-advertising, was with Arthur Mee in tune with his attitude to life: the wonder of 'Arthur Mee,' in which he was so continuously interested! Indeed, and again strictly in harmony with that attitude, the Arthur Mee one knew so well could write about this Arthur Mee as another person. That is why I suggest that none among the host of



A glimpse within the
Library at Eynsford
Hill and, left, Arthur
in his Summer-house,
where he edited *The
King's England*.

PLATE XIII



Looking over London from the roof of the Children's Newspaper office, the dome of Old Bailey showing in left centre and the 'bride's-cake' spire of St. Bride's on extreme left; and at the window of his editorial room, John Carpenter House, looking towards the River Thames, a stone's-throw away, where so much of his writing and editing was done. The building seen through the window is the City of London School, founded by John Carpenter, Lord Mayor's Secretary in the time of Richard Whittington.

PLATE XIV



his admiring readers would find anything amiss in his writing this four-page supplement on 'Arthur Mee's Jubilee,' and an entirely admirable piece of writing it was. The whole would bear reprinting, for it is a vivid and exhilarating review of fifty years' achievement. A few extracts will suffice to savour its quality.

A man's life may seem a small thing on this great globe that whirls through space at a thousand miles an hour, so that we have all travelled with the earth 438 million miles in these fifty years; and yet it is the mind of a man that is the most impressive thing in all this boundless Universe. It matters in the scheme of evolution whether a man throws his life away or whether he uses it well. It may be that no man has yet been satisfied with his life's work as he looks back, for how much better it could all have been!

But it is allowed to a man that he should be thankful for his opportunities and for the Power that has guided him in using them. He may thrill with a grateful satisfaction at the thought of all he has tried to do, the memory of all he has seen; and he may live again, as he faces the setting sun, through the joyous life of other days. He may remember that it was good to be spellbound by the wonderful dramatisation of sound we call Handel's Messiah, that it was lovely to be walking by the Arno on a sunny day as Michael Angelo and Robert Browning walked, that it was pleasant to be sailing up the Nile among the shadows of Pharaoh's ancient land, that it was thrilling to see Greece and Rome. He may like to remember that he has planted a thousand trees and a mile of hedges, and made a garden from a poor ploughed field.

He would like to recapture the sense of wonder as he watched the opening of a Saxon grave and saw a Saxon lady lying there, as he dug up a Roman villa and brought to light a Roman footprint and the marks of a Roman fire. He will not forget that he has looked on the face of the Pharaoh who would not let his people go, that he has seen Cuthbert's coffin and Drake's drum, that he has held in his hands the head of Oliver Cromwell and said to himself: *Alas, poor Cromwell, where be your great orations, your thunderings, which were wont to set kings and parliaments and armies in a roar?* He can never lose the delight of having seen more of his Motherland than any of our kings, every county, every cathedral, thousands of lovely places and thousands of rare treasures.

He will not forget the sight of the little old lady in black who rode

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through London in an open carriage and lives in history as Queen Victoria, the Kaiser riding through London on a white horse, or Mr. Gladstone among his own folk at home and at great public meetings. He will not forget Wilbur Wright in his leather jacket tapping away at his new-fangled plane, flying in it over the Pyrenees, and saying that he hoped the end of it all would be to bring peace to the world by drawing men together. He still seems to hear B. P. talking of his Scouts over a fourpenny lunch, William Watson talking of his meeting with Tennyson, and Alfred Harmsworth urging him to go to Germany to learn something of 'his future masters.'

It fills him with thankfulness to know that he has been 20,000 days well and not 100 days ill, that he has had 20,000 quiet nights and only a hundred noisy ones; and he remembers that the noisy ones began at Pisa 20 years ago, when Mussolini's young hooligans tramped the streets all night and started the hooliganism of Europe which was to give all our Island noisy nights. Still the bombs seem to be falling about him as he sleeps and wakes, wakes and sleeps, in the underground hole in which he hid for a hundred nights, in a village in which no life was hurt by a thousand bombs.

We will let his customary round figure for the bombs pass, on the ground that he included the small fire-bombs with the large H.E., and in any case I give (page 111) the official figures which were menace enough relative to the small area wherein the abominable things came down.

Things both great and small, from the slackness of the country postal service to the iniquity of bombing, came, as usual, under his review, and he is not ashamed to acknowledge the joy it had been for him to live through these years and to do so many things worth doing because of his natural gifts as an editor and a writer—gifts which do not commonly go together.

There is no life in the world that can compare with a writing man's if he believes in God and man and loves his work. He has the power that all have of making the world a better place, but to him comes the unique chance of sending about the world the ideas that make events, that mould the lives of men and shape the history of nations. He may sit year after

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year at his desk and be little seen and known, but he is master of a force that works without ceasing, an influence now growing slowly, irresistibly, like a tree of life from year to year, now burning with a passion like a fire, now shattering ignorance like a piece of dynamite. He multiplies his life a thousandfold, a millionfold. It may be today, or tomorrow, or ten years or fifty years hence, but the writing man's seed will bear its harvest. For good or ill he makes the future, and well may a man shudder now who has been writing through these momentous fifty years.

And thus he concludes his review of Arthur Mee through fifty years with an avowal that is characteristic of his unfaltering faith and his upbringing:

Well do we know that there is something not ourselves that comes with us through the years, that gives us strength in weakness, courage in failure, endurance in long-suffering, and the assurance that, whatever may befall, our destiny is sure. He guides us and the bird along our pathless way, and in His good time we shall arrive.

The foregoing is one more reaffirmation of his faith which, since he began the Children's Newspaper with the avowed purpose of campaigning for Goodness, he took every proper occasion to express in a way that leaves one in no doubt of the extent to which it possessed him at all times, shaping all his thoughts and his way of life. Yet he was never, in the ordinary minglings of his social and business affairs, remotely inclined to be 'preachy,' laughter and the joy of living prevailing over things serious or sad. But pen in hand and his thinking-cap adjusted, he was always ready with his opinions and valiant for his faith.

Mr. Frank Salisbury, one of the most eminent English portraitists and a personal friend of Arthur's, signalled his jubilee by painting that charming portrait which serves as frontispiece to this biography and is so completely a 'speaking likeness' of its subject that I have confessed to the artist my fear of being able to build up with my pen any impression of our friend that will convey to the

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reader so faithfully the charm of his personality as the artist has contrived to give us with his paint-brush.

As Mr. Salisbury's autobiography has been written since Arthur's death, it is appropriate to make note of it at this point. Under the happy title of *Portrait and Pageant*, it is an important addition to the social history of Arthur's lifetime, the artist being only a few months the senior of his friend. The book is full of pleasant personalia relating to the celebrities who have 'sat for' Mr. Salisbury, and these he classes as 'Kings, Presidents, and People,' while the numerous historical pictures that bear the signature of Frank O. Salisbury in the chief art galleries of Britain, India, and the Dominions, as well as in a number of American galleries, furnish his pen with attractive stories of his brush in recording the pageantry of his time. Mr. Salisbury's autobiography is dedicated to Arthur's memory in terms which I am delighted to think would have stood unaltered had Arthur still been bodily with us, for as I read these words I feel that the writer of them, like myself, is another who looks upon Arthur as somehow still present in our lives:

TO ARTHUR MEE

Whose wide knowledge and stimulating genius have won the admiration and fired the imagination of the youth of all ages of the English-speaking world, this volume is affectionately dedicated.

Mr. Salisbury's judgement of Arthur must also find a place here, but in quoting the passage below I should mention that I have not attempted to verify his reference to the number of Arthur's printed pages that have been distributed over the earth. The figure given may be no overstatement.

One of the last portraits painted at Sarum Chase before the studio was closed from September 1940 for two years, was of that lovable genius,

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Arthur Mee, who was just celebrating his Jubilee as a journalist. What an accomplishment! What a profound store of knowledge and facts he had accumulated, what a wealth of wisdom it was his to pass on to humanity! He stood a veritable hero to the youth of the world. His own personal books, apart from his educators and encyclopedias, have long since passed the million circulation mark. It has been calculated that he sent out into the world twenty-five thousand million printed pages. I have never met such a worker. His letters to me were often dated Midnight on his Kent hilltop. What treasures he showered upon the world!

His death, most lamentable, occurred while this volume was passing through the press. Deploring his loss, I can but express my confident belief that his great work will endure, and his spirit abide, a lasting light and inspiration.

All the activity occasioned by his jubilee was of a piece with Arthur's character as I am endeavouring to convey it in the medium of this book. He found himself after fifty years of journalism so surprised with what he had achieved that he was as delighted with the result as on that day when he became an apprentice reporter and saw the world at his feet! When I read his indenture of apprenticeship the other day, it sounded extraordinarily like a document from a Roman father selling his son into slavery for a few dinari per week over a period of four years. But little did Arthur reck about its terms, we may be sure: the one thing that mattered was that at the end of his 'articled' years he would emerge a full-fledged reporter, and take over his own destiny as a journalist.

It is the reward of the enthusiast that he never loses his joy of anticipation until it merges in the delight of achievement, and then *everything seems more astonishing to him than before*. The end that crowns the work is also an urge to continue. So he sets out, as we have seen, to tell the world about it in writing of himself with unfeigned admiration, almost as though he were adding another to his gallery of heroes. If no man is a hero to his valet, he may see a vision of himself which he hopes resembles what he would like

to have been, and the facts as Arthur recalls them may be allowed to justify this. Arthur Mee the writer was as totally unconscious of mock heroics as of mock modesty on the occasion of his jubilee, but thrilling with gladness at the things that had happened to him and the things he had been able to do in those fifty wonderful years.

It was but natural that his jubilee should have called forth a spate of congratulatory letters from correspondents of all sorts and from his readers in all parts of the empire. These I have examined rather sadly, for none of the writers, nor yet his most intimate friends, not even Arthur himself, could have guessed how soon the long-enduring vitality which he was displaying in his work and person at that time was to be extinguished, and the blithe spirit we had known so long in its lively physical framing, was to be recaptured only in his own writings and the memorials of his life.

I have made little use of the abundant letters from innumerable correspondents, which he had preserved, because there is so much to say about him without burdening this book with matter that does not further it as a study of a unique personality; nor have I sought to secure from any of his correspondents copies of his letters to them which would have illustrated his flair for amusing letter-writing. I am content to assure my readers that he would often indulge himself in a riot of fancy which was entirely for the delight of his correspondent. Though this is scarcely necessary when I remember the examples I have given earlier in letters to myself.

But, by way of pendent to this record of Arthur's jubilee as editor and writer, I have selected from the mass of correspondence a few brief letters which I think he would have been pleased to see printed.

The following from the Rt. Hon. Isaac Foot, distinguished father of very brilliant sons who have won eminence in politics and journalism, will be read with approval:

HIS YEAR OF JUBILEE

10 Dec., 1941.

My dear Arthur Mee,

I have been reading a lot about you lately. I read every word in the 'Methodist Recorder' this week with special satisfaction. It is a grand record to look back upon, and one is glad to think it is not an obituary notice!

I have been reading a good deal lately about the fall of France. If that country had had a 'Children's Newspaper' during the past 25 years it might have been saved from that debacle.

Yours always,

ISAAC FOOT.

And this from his greatly respected fellow Liberal, Viscount Samuel:

21st October, 1941.

Dear Mr. Mee,

It was good of you to send me a copy of your Jubilee article. Both my wife and I have read it with the greatest interest and pleasure.

We send our cordial congratulations on the completion of fifty years of splendid work.

With all good wishes for the future,

Yours very sincerely,

SAMUEL.

Mr. Angus Watson, whose work of social service Arthur so much applauded, marked the occasion of the jubilee with a letter from which I extract a paragraph that must have brought a glow to the recipient:

I would have sooner been the creator of The Children's Newspaper than have secured a dukedom, for it is quite impossible to estimate all the fruits that have come out of this wonderful achievement.

The letter which the late J. B. Firth, of the Daily Telegraph, wrote to Arthur at his Jubilee I have already quoted as far back as page 47, where it chanced to fit in with the drift of my story if one ignores the date of its writing; but of all the scores of letters

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which the occasion called forth, I am sure none gave the recipient keener pleasure than this of his old colleague and friend from the opening days of his great adventure in journalism with the house of Harmsworth:

11th Octr. 1941.

My dear Friend,

My warmest congratulations on your Jubilee. You will have been overwhelmed with such messages and you have deserved them all. The library of the books you have written and your Children's Newspaper, and nothing in all of them that you could wish deleted! You can look back on your 50 years with pride—and with thankfulness.

Yet are these celebrations a little sad to those who like myself are your contemporaries. I don't like to see my friends growing old in such days as these. The good days are behind us, and none of us will live to see the Jubilee of Peace. Well for us if we are allowed to live on into the earliest dawn of a new era.

Go on and prosper.

With kindest regards,

Yours very sincerely,

CECIL HARMSWORTH.

It was in tune with the modesty of the first Lord Harmsworth that he signed himself in the old familiar style under which Arthur first knew him. Less than two years later Lord Harmsworth was amongst the mourners who attended Arthur Mee's memorial service at St. Dunstan's Church (the journalists' sanctuary) in Fleet Street, where a bronze bust of the founder of the Harmsworth fortunes has a place against the front wall of its familiar tower. 'Go on and prosper.' How vain are the kindest of human wishes!

BİR YAZ GECESİ RÜYASI ÜZERİNE BİR İKİ DÜŞÜNCE

Bizim Çocuk Haftamızın başlangıcı, bilinir ki, büyük yazar W. SHAKESPEARE'in de ölüm yıldönümüdür. Biz, Ankara ve belki de memleket ilkokullarımızda ilk olarak onun bu güzel eserini oynamayı denemeğe karar verdik. "Bir Yaz Gecesi Rüyası" başka memleketlerde sık sık çocuk sahnelerine konan eserler arasındadır.

Bu eserin Türkçesi **Arthur Mee**'in metodlarına dayanarak Münir Hayri Egeli tarafından bizim çocuklarımıza göre düzenlenmiştir. Bu düzenlemede **Shakespeare**'in metni olduğu gibi bırakılmış yalnız eserden ilkokul sahnesi için ağır gelecek bazı cümle ve sahneler çıkarılmıştır. Bütün bunlar tertiplenirken konunun olduğu gibi muhafazasına bilhassa dikkat edilmiştir.

Bu boyda bir eserin çocuk sahnesine ilk geçmesi gibi, çocuklarımızın da bunu ne kadar güzel anladıkları ve ne kadar zevkle oynadıklarını seyretmek hepimize kıvanç verecek bir olaydır.

Dekor ve kostümler küçüklerin ağabeyleri
Can Egeli'nin yardımıyla, çocuklar, öğretmenleri,
ana ve babaların erbirliği ile
yapılmıştır.

Facsimile of page from programme of ARTHUR MEE's version of A Midsummer Night's Dream, from his Children's Shakespeare, produced at Ankara, Turkey, on 23 Nisan (April), 1946. The heading of the Turkish text is "A Few Thoughts on A Midsummer Night's Dream," and other passages read: "It is well known that the anniversary of the death of that great writer William Shakespeare falls in the beginning of our children's week. It is our custom in Ankara and indeed throughout the country in our primary schools to present five plays. . . . A Midsummer Night's Dream has been prepared in Turkish for performance by children by Munir Hayri Egeli from an adaptation by ARTHUR MEE. . . ."

Courtesy of the Science Librarian of the British Council

XV

VALIANT FOR VICTORY

WITH the onset of the Second World War, whatever other ideas for books Arthur may have been contemplating—and among his notes I could see that he had accumulated material for three that would have been rich in attraction for his innumerable admirers: ‘Hilltop’ would have sung the joys of living in his charming home, to which he had so often made reference in his writings; Round My Room, which would have had his splendid library for its theme; and Setting Sun, in which he had meant to tell of his life’s journey when he had passed his seventieth year—these and such other themes for books as he may have dreamt of writing some day had all to give way before the supreme topic of the War. With energy unimpaired and his mental faculties keyed up to the great problems of life and death with which the peoples of Europe were suddenly confronted, his ardent love of righteousness and liberty of thought inspired him to some outbursts of writing as noteworthy as any he had attempted in his finest years. In the full tide of his powers when the War started and until it had run more than half its course, he wrote and compiled with such devotion that one might have suspected he had some suspicion he would not see the downfall of the forces of evil against which he inveighed with such vigour of invective. Little more than three years remained to him, but in that time he produced no fewer than seven books, several of them amongst the best he ever wrote. In 1939 came Why We Had to Go to War, a clear statement of the case for the Allies, and also Arthur Mee’s Black-Out Book, a curious scrap-book. Arranged in a score

of sections, it contains hundreds of short poems, selections of prose and poetry, a literary bran-tub in fact, with little that is characteristic of Arthur's own, not even a preface, but certainly an ideal book for carrying with you to the shelter. It would have served to take one's mind off the bombing through scores of raids; its obvious purpose. A clever piece of book-making, let's say, and let it go at that.

But in 1941 he brought out three other books, two of them in his best style, *The Book of the Flag*, and '1940': *Our Finest Hour*. *The Book of the Flag* is in the succession of his best 'Arthur Mee Books,' a noble volume brilliantly conceived, brilliantly written, and not less brilliantly illustrated. No wonder it had run into four editions between its first printing in September and December of the same year, and I should doubt if a copy remained unsold in any bookshop after Christmas had gone! Arthur had no shame in believing in the British Empire, and in the twenty-eight sections of this book he celebrates its history and its contribution to the civilising of the world with a verve and sincerity of belief which should make every son of the British race who reads it proud of his heritage. Many a man has been created a Knight of the Order of the British Empire for far less service to the Empire than this one book of Arthur's represents. Its story was never told with greater gusto or persuasion, and we can readily understand how great Dominion leaders like Mackenzie King and Viscount Bennett hastened to compliment him on it. At no time has there been a greater need for such a book than today, and it is to be hoped its publishers will never let it go out of print, even though its price (12s. 6d.) may have to be increased because of the superb style of its production. His *Book of the Flag* must have been in preparation well before the outbreak of the War, and it was fortunate that it could be issued before the paper famine became acute, but '1940' is entirely a thing of the War, and a very inspiring thing indeed. It has something of

the character of a War Diary, in so far as it was written week by week, but it is worth at least a dozen 'War Diaries' I could name. Its purpose is well described by its author:

Nineteen-forty will probably be remembered in all history as our finest hour. We suffered incredible disasters. We sustained unparalleled betrayals. We ran stupendous risks. We took upon ourselves overwhelming burdens. We endured intolerable humiliations. We were flung into the very depths of grief.

But we carried on. Guided by the Hand of God and sustained by our own right arm, we came through the shadows of defeat into the sunlight of a nobler dawn.

The chapters of this book have been written week by week as the poignant drama of our finest year unfolded itself. They are not meant to be a narrative of events. They are an optimist's view of the war, and are gathered together as a record of the emotions stirring within us during these 366 historic days and nights.

Notice how dramatically he can state his case for the Christian way of life, of which he says, 'We mean by that a life based on humanity, and kindness, and opportunity, and truth, and justice, and the greatest of all these, charity':

It has been the dream of Christianity for nearly two thousand years that it should overcome the world. It began in a manger. It was hunted and persecuted and driven underground. Its Founder was crucified. But Christianity went on. Nineteen centuries ago it was a little band of men armed with nothing but the memory of what their Master had said. Against them was the Roman Empire, Caesar and his legions, masters of the world. These plain men went forth to conquer, to overcome the principalities and powers with the explosive force of fifteen words:

Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them.

It was an explosive force because it was something new in an old, old world. It was Love that had come to live on the earth, the love of a man for his neighbour and his brother. It was on the banner of twelve men, and it was their mission to convert the world.

. . . In the early years of the first century twelve men set out to capture the world for Christianity. In the early years of the twentieth century a little band set out to capture the Christian world for Barbarism.

If Arthur's friend Dr. Clifford had been alive, he would have read '1940' with elation, remembering it had been written by one of his own communion, although Arthur's religious views had noticeably widened in his later years, so that he hardly ever disclosed the least touch of sectarianism. In this very book he writes 'Out of mystery we came, into mystery we go, but the glory of the years between has been beyond the power of words to tell.' And as we read each chapter of '1940' we know why Arthur Mee could not help but be a force in the lives of his contemporaries; the energy of his style comes straight from his belief in what he has to say; he writes as the prophets of old in the simple directness of his attack on the things of evil that had raised their heads in the world. And I shall say that no better sermons were preached from any pulpit in 1940 than many that could be extracted from this book of his.

As he grew in years his writing had taken on a richness of expression which made a not very original thought sound as if it had just been minted from the precious metal of the mind. Although not above criticism here and there, occasionally from over-statement or a doubtful reading of history, it is no over-statement that '1940' was one of the most individual and powerful books written in the early period of the War. And, remembering that this passage was written in the week that Mussolini dragged Italy into the War, it has a touch of the prophetic: 'Mussolini has forgotten many things. He has forgotten that if the Germans win every battle in 1940, and every battle in 1941, and every battle in 1945, they will lose the last, for the resources of the Democracies are inexhaustible, and they alone can endure to the end.' There is vision, and knowledge, in that as well as eloquence. '1940,' which quickly went through four large editions, had a splendid press, and with its first edition the publishers were happy to announce that they had now issued a million copies of the Arthur Mee Books published by them. Had these been mere works of fiction, such sales covering more than thirty books

would not have been sensational, but for works of serious interest, appealing only to readers of thoughtful and instructive literature, they were in the highest degree gratifying.

In 1942 *Immortal Dawn* appeared, and in 1943 came *Wonderful Year*. With '1940', these three spirited and inspiring commentaries on the War were to prove the swan song of Arthur Mee. Among all the flood of books the War called forth they will stay in that select class of the relatively few worthy of remembrance as records of adventure in the realm of the spirit. A word or two about the circumstance of their writing will interest those who marvel at his extraordinary productiveness. One of the many *dicta* of Robertson Nicoll that I have seen verified many times over was that in which he said the journalist as author can only be a success if he makes his journalism good enough for reprinting in book form. I know of very few exceptions to this rule, and Arthur Mee is not quite one of these, although he was something different. For the last twenty-five years of his life, each of them as wonderful as the preceding ten which I have chronicled, he was a journalist who thought in terms of books. He wrote little in the *Children's Newspaper* that he did not also have in mind as suitable for furnishing forth a book some day. His War books offer a good illustration of this, for every chapter in them had made its first appearance as a front-page article in his weekly paper. But they had all to undergo heavy revision before they were right for making into a book, and no adult reader unacquainted with their author's journalism (if we could imagine any such) could ever have guessed that they were originally written for children to read! It is improbable that these particular books found many readers among the juvenile public; their appeal was directed to the grown-ups, and the chorus of praise with which they were received was voiced entirely by readers whose own days took most of them back to the beginning of the century. I could mention many famous names that appear on the hundreds of congratulatory

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letters he received, but prefer to give one only, as I know that none gave Arthur greater pleasure. It came from one of his many American correspondents, and is deeply interesting because it was written before the U.S.A. had entered the War. The writer was Justice Lewis L. Fawcett of the Supreme Court of the State of New York. I take a few passages only from his long and admiring epistle, which was not addressed to Arthur but to his friend Frank O. Salisbury, who had sent him a copy of '1940':

Accept assurance of my deep appreciation for 'Nineteen Forty' by Arthur Mee. The volume is gloriously inspirational.

It is a gripping, thrilling, classic word-picture of experiences, adventures and conditions in the war zone last year. It has a spiritual appeal and an awakening of faith profounder than anything I have read outside Holy Writ. The masterful presentation of the issues and the circumstances and conditions interwoven therewith make his conclusions portraying ultimate victory for the British Cause irrefutable. Triumph she must and shall!

Arthur Mee writes as a man in whose soul God dwells. He preaches many marvellous sermons. I wish every man, aye, and woman too, might read his great book. I read the book aloud to sisters and brothers on two evenings, while we were gathered about the family fireside. All regarded it as highly entertaining, instructive, informative, revealing, and prophetic.

What Justice Fawcett wrote might well be taken as expressing the general opinion of Arthur's large following of adult readers throughout the British Empire and Commonwealth, and would apply in no less measure to the two companion books with which his career as an author closed so suddenly and out of due time. From his literary remains it would seem he was contemplating a final War book to be entitled *Crowning Glory*.

Whatever one's opinion may be of the merits of Arthur Mee's books as contributions to English literature—and there is room for difference of opinion on that subject—no one is likely to dispute

their inspirational value to his own age. Arthur was a believer in prayer, and though he may never have read a single novel of George Meredith's (to whom I had given years of study which Arthur thought I might have spent more profitably!), he would have applauded his dictum, 'Who rises from prayer a better man, his prayer is answered.' This I would paraphrase by saying 'Who lays down a book of Arthur Mee's after reading it, rises a happier man.' For he was not only an optimist himself, but the cause of optimism in others. He said a true thing in his farewell to the readers of his *Children's Encyclopedia* when he said that a book could never die; its material self would perish, but what was written in it, if it had come from the heart and had been read, would never pass away. I would compare any book that had been written in sincerity to a pebble cast in the Pool of Life, and suggest that its ripples would go on for ever widening in relation to the spiritual force with which it was charged. That is precisely the quality which makes a sincere book so vastly different from a common article of commerce, and as Arthur Mee wrote and edited so many 'books of his heart,' how great are the rippling circles of thought and conduct he must have set in motion!

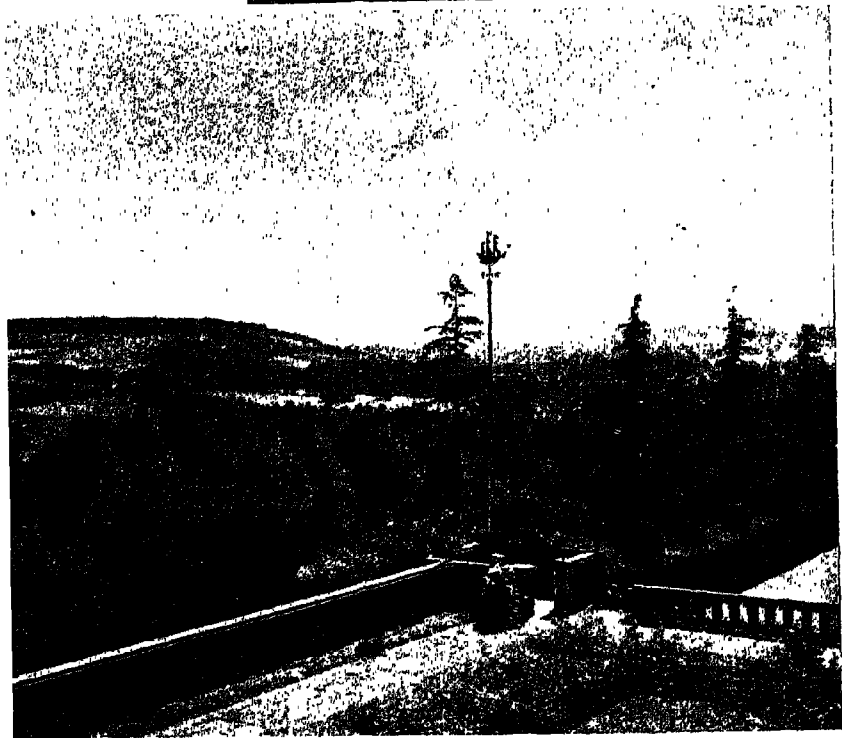
PLATE XV



Miss Margaret Allbright, daughter of the Manager of the West Ken Electric Company, presents Arthur Mee, as owner of Eynsford Hill with the first red rosebud by way of annual rent for grant of way-leave to the company to run an electric cable under his drive. (See p. 242. *Copyright, Daily Mirror.*

PLATE XVI

The flag that Arthur hoisted at Eynsford Hill at midnight on August 4, 1914. Below, the lovely view of the hills along the Darent valley from his gazebo, where the model of the Golden Hind 'still floats,' to quote his own words. Close to the extreme left of the view his ashes were strewn on the hills he had so long loved to look upon.



XVI

ARTHUR ON HIS HILLTOP

READERS of the older generation may remember that Grant Allen, who was a man of letters and a scholar as well as a writer of popular novels, which he regarded as mere bread-and-butter work, announced that whenever he decided to write a novel which he designed as a work of art, not 'written to order,' he would distinguish it from his task work by declaring it a 'Hilltop book.' There has always been a feeling of spiritual freedom in the ampler air at the top of a hill. Possibly Moses on Pisgah had some part in this age-old desire for hilltop prospects, or stout Cortez 'silent upon a peak in Darien' might be given as a more recent picture of the Excelsior spirit that led Arthur to determine upon building the home of his dreams in a position of eminence. There is little doubt that the resolution was taken after he had exhausted all possibilities of 'improving' his Hextable residence and was sighing for the further delights of playing at houses. An extra spur to depart into the country was the fact that the 'great wen' of London was growing alarmingly and might soon spread out as far as Uplands. I have been told that he announced his intention in these words: 'I will build a house for a thousand pounds in a garden that one man shall manage.' This I find difficulty in accepting, as he had a shrewd idea of house and land values by then, and I had it from him before his plans for transforming his chosen hilltop had matured that it would cost round about £16,000, which I consider was no excessive estimate for the work as originally carried out. And as for the one-man garden, for many years three permanent gardeners were employed,

with additional helpers as required by the seasons. No, that promise of his must have been spoken in jest, as he never made economy a condition, and as all his housing plans were more inclined to the grandiose than the economical, it is pretty certain he tackled the problem of his hilltop 'regardless of expense.' A thing he was well able to do by that time.

After scouring Kent for a desirable hill on the top of which to bring his dream house to reality, he selected a piece of high-lying ground amid ploughland, with a picturesque wood crowning the topmost level and bosky fringes running up to meet it. An attraction of the wood was its undergrowth, famed locally as a haunt of nightingales. To make the wood better for rambling in, he had the undergrowth cut out, and away went the nightingales; but while that might be looked upon as an unhappy loss, it had its compensations. The ground on which his home was to stand had all to be levelled and terraced before the building of the house and the planning of the gardens could proceed. We can well imagine the state of continual excitement existing in the household at Uplands for the next year while the work was proceeding at Eynsford, a few miles away; for in addition to pushing ahead with the building of the new home, there was the need to dismantle the very considerable residence with its numerous accretions at Hextable and get this to synchronise with the completion of the hilltop house: the sort of thing that never just goes according to plan. But the great task was accomplished, and as Arthur, during the thirty years he was to enjoy his hilltop, was frequently writing about it in his magazine and newspaper articles, I am going to take advantage of two little leaflets he prepared about it, which registered every detail from two strangely different points of view, and let my readers have it in the words of him who brought it to the state of perfection in which I have so often admired it, and in which I am glad to say I have seen it on recent visits in the present year of writing.

ARTHUR ON HIS HILLTOP

During the world slump which came upon us with such surprising suddenness in the late 'twenties with the collapse of all commercial values, Arthur was for a time, like so many others who had assumed large responsibilities with ample means to meet them and exceptional earning powers, a little concerned about the course of events which might to some extent modify his ideas of expenditure, especially in his case, as he had always been a believer in insurance and had large annual premiums to maintain. Indeed, he might have been a highly paid insurance official, so keen was he on advising all his friends to be 'covered' for all sorts of risks, though he would have scorned to profit from their following his advice. But during that period of what we may call the Great Depression, he entertained for a while the idea of selling his beloved hilltop with all its environment of beautiful things which his taste and vision had brought into being on what he was pleased to describe as 'One of the finest natural platforms near London.' No sooner had the idea possessed him than he sat down and prepared an alluring four-page prospectus illustrated with a dozen views of his home and views of the countryside as seen from his grounds and windows. A prospectus which fortunately was never sent out, else he would have found himself in a state of troubled perplexity, for he would have been overwhelmed with enquiries, and having offered the property at a 'knock-out' figure would have lamented his precipitate act for the rest of his life. From a copy of this rare bit of Arthuriana I am able to give the reader a glowing description of the place, which, unlike the usual estate agent's announcement, in no wise exaggerated the attractions of the property to be offered.

A MATCHLESS LITTLE WORLD OF YOUR OWN

Those who want a little world to call their own will find it here, in the heart of beautiful Kent, on one of the noblest hilltops within an hour of Charing Cross.

Rising by a winding drive a quarter of a mile long to a height above the church steeple, we find ourselves looking down on fifty miles of England—on a little church with the touch of the Saxon and the Norman in it, on cottages older than Shakespeare, on walls as old as Thomas à Becket—for it is said that within them the trouble began to brew between him and the king.

The river winds about the hill on its way from Westerham to the Thames; the valley stretches out a hundred fields till the horizon is crowned ten miles away with the Dome of Kent.

Yet, with all the feeling of spaciousness that such a hilltop gives, comes the shelter of acres of woodland crammed with pine and beech and oak and ash. The garden is rich with countless shrubs and trees. The flagged rose terrace, with its gazebo, is one of the noblest natural platforms in the world. The pergola, the turfed herbaceous border, the sloping lawn, the banks ablaze with colour and fragrant with sweetness, are like a dream on a spring or summer day.

It is not possible for the builder of a house like this to hope that his money will come back; and not only a small fortune in money has gone in carrying civilisation on to this hilltop: into it has gone the zeal and energy and enthusiasm of a lover of a beautiful and quiet life.

Designed by Mr. Morley Horder, one of the last pre-war houses built near London, the House has splendid views from every window, splendid rooms for every purpose, and is in every sense admirable, a small country home of great efficiency, in a setting difficult to match with obvious possibilities of easy extension for those who would wish to crown a site so unique with a larger house.

The owner will take for this hilltop a very little more than half the money he has spent on it in the last ten years.

What a disaster it would have been had he gone ahead with his temptation to sell this 'little world' which he had made so peculiarly his own! Happily the Great Depression, like the Great War, and the Great Everything Else, came to an end, and this cloud that hung for a little over his hilltop was dispersed for another ten or twelve years, during which he poured out from his library twenty-five of his best-selling individual books and had the further satisfaction of enjoying the finest period of the ever-expanding influence of his Children's Newspaper. A disaster in every way it would have been to part with

what had become so much an expression of himself. I can recall our many talks about the uncertainty of the time through which the world was passing, but not the least recollection of his having made any real decision to surrender his hilltop to the demon of Depression.

There was probably in this mood which led him to prepare for a retreat—if such ever seemed necessary, for it could never be desired—something that lingered from the only serious illness he had ever experienced before that which twenty years later came upon him as a shadow that would not pass. Asthma was the form of the illness that had one time threatened to make his life a misery, but to the relief of all his friends a stay of some months at Cannes, where he continued to carry on his work almost as productively as at home, had the effect of ridding him of that distressing complaint, though it may have had some effect in producing the mood that allowed him to entertain for a moment so disturbing a thought as letting his hilltop pass into other hands.

At all events, soon after he had composed that announcement of the property for sale he was throwing his grounds open to the public and had a notice posted at the gate saying 'Anyone who loves a garden is welcome to walk freely about this hilltop, any day from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.' This generous gesture was widely appreciated and had frequent commendation in the county newspapers, with the inevitable result that, after a season or two, the garden was often overcrowded. Owing to the 'Litter Louts' among the visitors, Arthur had to begin a campaign against them in the Children's Newspaper. This he renewed every summer afterwards with wide support from his readers, who became a sort of spearhead in his attack on 'the public's' want of manners. Eventually, two days only were set apart each summer for visitors, when a charge was made for the benefit of the Queen Alexandra Nursing Association.

For many years those two days of paid admission were as gratifying as the unrestricted public admission had been disappointing,

and every visitor was given a four-page leaflet written by Arthur entitled 'Eynsford Hill and Its Story.' Like everything he did, this catalogue of the things to be seen in his gardens has a uniqueness in its discursions which would make it possible to distil from it something of the writer's character. It runs a little too long for complete reprinting here, but I shall select some paragraphs which will help the reader to picture for himself what those far-famed gardens of his were like:

This hilltop, with a frontage of 800 feet looking down on Eynsford, was a ploughed field in the year before the war. Not a thing you see about you was here in 1913 except the wood.

The hilltop is an old sea bed; in making the garden the chalk was dug up for the first time to see the sun. Millions of years ago the sea rolled where you stand; a hundred thousand years ago came the mammoth; ten thousand years ago lions prowled this way; 1800 years ago came the Romans. The tiles from a Roman courtyard in Eynsford are in the garden path below the Golden Hind; a coin of Constantine has been dug up among our cabbages.

Nowhere on this hilltop is there naturally a foot of soil; it is poor stuff from which all this beauty has been wrung in 20 years.

High above the Rose Terrace, from the corner of the Gazebo, floats the Golden Hind, a copper model of Francis Drake's ship in which Englishmen for the first time sailed round the world. The model was made by Kent craftsmen in Hyder's Smithy at Plaxtol, from a photograph of a silver model given to Drake by Elizabeth. On the deck is a treasure chest made of Roman lead, lined with Saxon oak, containing a bullet from the Spanish Armada, a fragment of stone from Drake's old home, and an Elizabethan shilling which has touched Drake's drum.

At one corner of the Gazebo is an old sundial refusing to tell the time in these sad days of the fall of civilisation; facing it is a brass dial showing the bird's way to all parts of the Earth from this point.

It is curious that due north and due west the sea is exactly the same distance from this hilltop.

In a line due north there is nothing between here and the North Pole higher than the highest tree on this hilltop.

From the end of the Long Avenue, over the garage roof, we look down on Eynsford's Norman castle and on the church with its Norman door; it was by forbidding the lord of the castle to pass through this door that

Thomas Becket stirred up against him the enmity of the King's friends.

Down the Darent Valley the distance is ten miles, and in the middle of the horizon, like half an apple on the skyline, is the highest point of Kent, the Dome of Beccles at Ide Hill.

The angels on the low terrace on the lawn, and all the carving there, are from the Houses of Parliament, and have looked down on London for nearly a century. . . .

Under the Gazebo is a painted tile of an Egyptian queen, not old; she sits looking down at a Roman bathroom floor, let into the path. It is a huge mass of Roman concrete, brought up the hill from the ruins of a Roman Villa below, and radiating both ways from it are a hundred feet of Roman tiles from the courtyard of the house. At the corner of the concrete floor is a Roman footprint in a tile; at another part of the path is a print of a dog's paws, the dog having run over the tile when it was drying in the sun in Roman England. It is in the middle of the path near a white Cornish boulder. Hanging under the Gazebo is a lead pipe through which the water ran from a Roman bath. . . .

The small lead tank on the terrace wall is made of lead from the roof of Goodmanham Church in Yorkshire, the scene of the Great Council at which King Edwin decided to adopt Christianity, so leading to the founding of York Minster.

The flagmast in the courtyard rises out of the ruins of the Roman Empire; the tiles round it were dug up from the Roman villa which lies under a ploughed field at Darenth. The stone cannon ball by the flagmast was fired against England by the Spanish Armada.

At the Lily Pond in the wood, near the rustic gate, is a stone which has been seen by everybody who has been to London for about a hundred years; it was until 1932 the top stone of the central tower of the Houses of Parliament, and scratched on it is the mason's mark: *Bud of Central Spire*.

The Shelter by the pond was the first thing to come up the hill before the house. In it now is something a hundred million years old, the tail of an ichthyosaurus which lorded the Earth in those days; the end of its tail would be about 30 feet from its head.

In the piers of the round seat by the pond are the remains of a Roman supper eaten in Bynsford 1700 years ago, two oyster shells dug up from the Roman Villa here. . . .

The iron gate leading to the herb walk once belonged to Burne-Jones. Kipling would walk through it many times in those days.

There is much more about the curiosities to be looked for in

wandering round his pleasure grounds, as few of his visitors would be likely to have spotted one in ten of them without a guide; but I have quoted enough to let the reader see how free from all specialisation was the owner's fancy. He was concerned with everything that had any element of interest in it, just as we have seen him through all his years of writing and editing. His friend Bryant made a witty remark about him which is confirmed by the above extracts: 'For Arthur, a garden is less a thing to be enjoyed than a thing to be "edited."' I dissent, however, from Arthur's statement that the ichthyosaurus ever 'lorded the Earth,' as it was a sea beast when it attained to its greatest dimension, although some millions of years earlier its progenitors had lived on land. The porpoise and the whale are now its nearest kin, and we do not consider either of these as lords of the Earth! But the wonder to me is how Arthur, who was as busy at his desk as ever in his life during all his years at Eynsford, ever found the time to accumulate that vast and varied collection of unrelated things from the tail of that sea-lizard to that gate of Burne-Jones! His weakness for signs and mottoes had full play on the hilltop. Even the embossed metal plate which denoted 'The Little Garden of Happiness' was transported for the gate to an enclosure where he had planted bamboo and other exotic shrubs that did not flourish as well as he had hoped. On the finest ash tree in his wood he fixed a bronze tablet with this jingle:

*Books are made by fools like me,
But only God can make a tree,*

which I date after 1922, when Joyce Kilmer's well-known song 'Trees' was sung for the first of thousands of times, the second of these lines being the rousing crescendo of Rasbach's setting. But while he loved to express himself with signs and mottoes of things in his woodland walks his passion for tidiness made the paper labels

which horticulturists attach to their plants and shrubs hateful to him, and whenever a new consignment of stock for his borders and flower-beds had been received and planted out, still retaining their labels so essential for identification, he would steal out in the dusk and cut off every label. With the result that he never got to know the names of the flowering shrubs or plants in his gardens. And when showing visitors around he was always to be heard calling out to Mrs. Mee or her sister to tell him the name of the most ordinary blooms. Too impatient to acquaint himself with their botanical names, with the single exception of *Nepeta*, which he preferred to catmint, and too forgetful of the common names of flowers which he had not been familiar with since his childhood, he loved them all without much discrimination, and was even fond of dating things by their flower times: as 'The Children's Newspaper came out with the daffodils,' and, as I have noted, the preface of his *Golden Year*, which is dated 'Lilac Time.' This reminds me that Siegfried Sassoon mentions in *Siegfried's Journey* that he was told by Wilfred Scawen Blunt that Francis Thompson, 'the poet of nature' (as he calls him), did not know an elm from an oak. In Arthur's case a contributory factor to his lack of detailed knowledge in botany was probably his somewhat constricted vision, resulting from long neglect of his sight in his earlier years. To this we can scarcely attribute his lack of interest in the bird life around his hilltop, where a great crested woodpecker was providing Miss Marjorie Mee, one of whose hobbies is bird-watching, with much entertainment during one of my visits to Eynsford in 1946. Lack of patience would be the more probable reason. To sit still for half-an-hour studying bird life through binoculars was a kind of inaction quite foreign to Arthur's nature.

His love of fountains was as pronounced as that of the Moors in Spain, and he would have had a garden filled with fountains if the conformation of Eynsford Hill and the weather of Kent had been more favourable to that most delightful sort of garden adornment.

As it was, he had a big job to get a water supply carried to a height above the village where there had been no water since the whole of Southern England had lain under sea-level, evidence of which was constantly forthcoming as fossil remains of sea urchins, sea lilies, and other forms of marine life were turned up by the spade when excavating for the ponds he had constructed at descending levels from the reservoir in the wood down to the fountain that played by the flagged terrace opposite the main front of the house. Fountains played in each of two ponds on the way down from the top, and in the larger one goldfish flashed among the water lilies. He had made a little wonderland of his own on that hilltop, where a natural habitat was provided for all sorts of bird and insect life—especially do I remember the gorgeous dragon flies that used to haunt this major pond—but this was all for others to enjoy to the full; his greater wonderland lay within the doors of his beautiful home, and there within one room of it, his library. He was content to listen to all the stories of the wild and lovely things that could be seen outside for the watching, but it was his library that called. It was there he found romance, there that he dreamed his finest dreams, there that he would even pin down in the pages of the books he wrote many of the wonders that were reported to him as happening outside his own windows, leaving to others the pinning down of butterflies in their specimen books, which he would examine with the liveliest interest and descant upon whenever the opportunity came to his pen.

It is about time we went indoors to have a look at that room in which so large a part of his working life was spent. His presence still seems to pervade it. Even to a hardened sceptic like myself it gives an eerie feeling that any minute I shall hear his cheerful voice hailing me from the door as he comes smiling in to greet me. Everything remains as he left it for the last time: a model of order and neatness such as one is accustomed to see only in those princely

homes of England where the serried rows of noble tomes with their shimmering gilt and glossy morocco spines stand, from generation to generation, unopened, mere filling material for the lovely Georgian bookcases which entomb them. But here in Arthur's library all books had some useful purpose to fulfil; for consultation mainly, but many for love of their contents. And all were catalogued and indexed for ready reference; for when he wished to find some quotation, some reference to a half-forgotten passage, his impatience demanded an immediate key, and the patient devotion of Miss Fratson, who acted as his amanuensis and librarian for nearly half his lifetime, was sure to have provided it. This passion for orderliness ruled in his editorial offices as in his library at home. His own desk was never to be seen in the state of chaos which a certain type of literary worker, such as found more profitable occupation during the two great Wars of our lifetime in the multitudinous offices of our great bureaucracy, regard as an essential sign of their laborious days. Every manifestation of slovenliness was abhorrent to him, above all that affectation of disorder which is mere eyewash to impress others with the magnitude of one's task. Out of this orderliness came his immense achievement as a writer and editor of books.

The library at Eynsford differed from that which he had abandoned at Hextable in two respects. It was designed as an integral part of the architectural plan for a bookroom and study, and many hundreds of its many thousand volumes were specially bound in costly box-calf or Levantine leathers; the shelves that bore the immense number of his own published works formed a goodly library of blue and gold within a vaster library of many colours. Upon a volume that required a permanent place on his shelves he could not bear to look if it was not pleasing to the eye, and where a book had been disfigured with an advertisement, as on the back of a directory or some such publication, the offending portion of the binding was neatly hidden by a piece of cloth or leather harmonising with the

general colour of the binding it was pasted over. The bookman's love of pleasing exteriors had grown upon him even while the pages within were still treasured for some practical purpose. Boxes made to look like books, charmingly bound, housed great collections of pamphlets. There never was a tidier library used by author or editor for working in, on hilltop or in valley.

The famous cabinet of press clippings never came to Eynsford. Its usefulness had declined when Arthur took to book-writing and his more specialised forms of journalistic work, after saying good-bye in effect to miscellaneous newspaper writing. There was no room for it at Eynsford, and it passed into the hands of another writer. But so long ago as 1907 he could say of his library that he 'would not part with its contents for a gold-mine in Johannesburg. It was the result of the well-employed leisure hours and odd moments snatched from ten busy years.' At that time it already ran to 5,000 books, half of them found in second-hand bookshops and in second-hand catalogues, 'covering every subject under the sun.' In his own words, written nearly forty years ago, 'It contains a record of everybody of importance who has ever lived, a history of every country that has ever been! It has within its four walls the best thoughts of the best thinkers of all ages. It is a temple of all that was permanent in the past, of all the hopes of men for the future.' And then this about his cabinet: 'It has a cabinet of a quarter of a million articles, paragraphs, notes, and references, taken from magazines, newspapers, and books. From this material five thousand columns of London daily papers have been written, and the writer claims that the cabinet is inexhaustible. It grows in interest and freshness every day, and the time can never come, so long as it is maintained, when a clever journalist could not earn a handsome income by sitting in his library with a typewriter in front of him, a telephone at his side, and a post office within reach.'

There speaks the practical Arthur, but though he had given up

that type of journalism some six or seven years before he settled down to his life's work at Eynsford in 1914, the nicely bound scrap-books preserving all those 5,000 newspaper columns he had written so long ago were still readily accessible, as I found in going through his bookshelves the other day. Alongside them, contained in seven or eight huge scrap-books with green morocco backs and gilt lettering, was the collection of Arthur Mee's Vanity Books! These contained hundreds of newspaper and magazine articles directly referring to some aspect of Arthur, his personality, and his work through his many years of manifold activities. The title of the great collection is at once true and disarming!

The finely panelled door of the Library is almost opposite the vestibule as you enter the house, as if to emphasise the fact that here was the first apartment to see on going in and the last on going out. The room itself is divided into two distinct parts by a cross section of solidly built oak shelving, pierced by a space wider than a door would be, through which you enter the main part of the library, where a cosy alcove half encloses the mantelpiece and generous fireplace. And everywhere books, and more books on the walls in their polished oak cases. The mullioned windows in the larger of the two sectors, like those in the lesser first entered, look out upon the lawns, rich in low stone balustrades and descending stairways to the farther lawns, with their tree-fringed terraces on the rising ground to the summer-house. On the left there is an unrestricted prospect which discloses miles of the lovely Darent valley, its well-tilled fields creeping up the farther hills into the dark shadows of wood and copse—hills on which the ashes of him who created this ideal home and surrounded himself and his friends with so much loveliness were strewn by his wish when he could no longer look on that scene of loveliness with mortal eyes.

Arthur's writing-table and chair stood before the windows of the inner room of his library. A few occasional tables, an easy chair or

two completed the furniture, for he greatly favoured a room that was not overcrowded, preferring to have space around him as he wrote or studied, and most commonly would he be found in one of these easy chairs scribbling on a writing-pad laid upon his knee, or reading, as the mood was on him. He also liked all sorts of bronze statuettes and objets d'art, and gave full play to this fancy of his in most of the rooms and in the library most of all. Here is a list (written by himself) of the rare and beautiful things he had accumulated there, all of which were so disposed about the walls, and side tables, and window-sills, that there was no sort of crowding though the tally of them may look formidable:

There are portraits in bronze and earthenware many hundreds of years older than Christianity.

A terracotta head of an actor from Cyprus, about 400 B.C., and a terracotta head of a man with a look of eternal youth, from Tanagra, about 200 B.C.

A cameo of Antinous (friend of Hadrian) in two-strata agate (Roman).

A Roman glass vase.

Fragment of an inscribed brick baked in Rome about A.D. 122 (in the reign of Hadrian).

A stone worn down by a Roman who used it for sharpening his knife.

There is a solemn white figure of a priest who looks out across my books after sleeping with an Emperor of China for more than a thousand years.

A tablet recording that a man had bought a cow in Nebuchadrezzar's Babylon.

A sword that was wielded in the great Crusades.

A Ming plate.

Wax impression of the Great Seal of Charles the Second.

Piece of copper from Nelson's Victory.

Piece of oak that was growing in England when Alfred was driving back the Danes.

Piece of stone from Westminster Abbey and a piece of wood from the roof of William Rufus in Westminster Hall.

A little shell with green paint in it from the toilet table of a lady of Old Egypt, used for painting her eyebrows.

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Charcoal crumbs from the hearth of Grimes Graves.

A bronze Ibis mummy box unopened, from ancient Egypt, about 800 B.C.

An 18th-century silhouette of the Nativity.

An 18th-century sampler.

A miniature of Sir John Moore.

Matthew Arnold's watchstand—given to A. M. by Sir William Watson.

A Papyrus letter.

Mummy wheat bought in Cairo.

Edmund Burke's nutmeg-grater. Given to A. M. by Dr. Williamson of Guildford, Surrey.

There is a page of a book printed by Caxton—from 'The Chronicles of England and Description of Britain.'

The only perfect copy of this edition is, so far as we know, the one in the Library of Lambeth Palace.

One of my little Roman lamps is one of the earliest Christian signs, with the first two letters of Christ's name in Greek, and with three circles—one for eternity, one for his divinity, one for his humanity.

Another of my lamps shows the mark of the flame. It sets us thinking; some Roman poet was it writing by this flickering light?

Another little lamp is from Greece, found in Provence.

These notes I have compiled from material he was gathering for that book *Round My Room*, on the writing of which he was never to make a start.

Once more I would point out that in printing this miscellaneous catalogue of the things he had collected in his travels and loved to have around him in his library he was but proving—though no proof was needed!—that he was no specialist, that his mind and fancy roamed wherever there was anything of interest to attract his attention. Withal that library at Eynsford Hill was such as few writing men of his time had ever contrived to gather, and I remember how his friend J. A. Spender used to marvel at it, but I would not say to envy it, as that fine journalist was as far from envy as John Morley, who was so little desirous of having great possessions

that he accepted Carnegie's gift of his almost priceless library only to turn it over to one of the universities. Spender was one of Arthur's real heroes, and when he came over from time to time to visit him on his hilltop Arthur assured me that he brought an atmosphere of peace and gentleness which made him always sorry to see him take his leave.

One could write at some length about many other features of Arthur's home, as it was designed with great skill to give the maximum of daylight in every room and corridor, but perhaps we have lingered here long enough, and beyond remarking on the excellent planning of the ground floor, where a long and wide corridor runs the whole length of the house to serve the main rooms opening in it directly, and the finely proportioned staircase ascending from the hall, which is a lateral extension of the corridor, I shall not attempt any further detail. All the rooms of the house reflect in some way or other the taste of its owner. In short, a dwelling-place of great charm was the home of Arthur Mee.

Mindful of a compliment from H. G. Wells, on not having 'crumbled down into anecdote,' in face of much temptation I have not, I trust, overworked the vein of anecdote in these pages which are nearing an end, and if I now relate two of a personal kind, my excuse is that they shed a sidelight upon the character of the very remarkable man who is the subject of this memoir. I had forgotten, until reminded the other day at Eynsford by Mrs. Mee, that when I first visited Hilltop in its earliest days, as we gathered in the Library for coffee or 'soft drinks,' I found the semi-enclosure of the fireplace so reminiscent of the little refreshment bars I had seen in some of the luxury homes of America, where I had been on a visit, that I leant over the broad oak ledge and said 'A gin-and-bitters for me, please.' At no little cost Arthur had his alcove so altered that it could never be mistaken for a 'private bar'! And incidentally effected an improvement, let me add. This although he was fully aware that the returned travel-

ler was merely jesting. Not even the appearance of the facility for providing a gin-and-bitters could be tolerated anywhere in Hilltop!

The other anecdote concerns a more serious matter. He had suddenly decided that a summer-house would be a good place for him in which to write and edit the volumes of 'The King's England.' And forthwith he determined that he would have his summer-house erected upon the broad stone terrace that flanked the lawns in front of the library windows. To do this he was forced to cut into the stone wall behind. When he had every reason to think that all would be ready for the day appointed for me to see the fulfilment of this latest idea, the glaziers let him down. They had not been able to fix the leaded lights for the windows. So Arthur motored to some shop in the district where they dealt in that 'art craft' stuff which pretended to be what it was not, and with an ample supply of the thin lead strips whereby plain glass could be made to look (for a while) like leaded lights, he had the summer-house looking like a finished structure before he had shown it, apologising for the sham, as he hated all imitations! But I immediately condemned him for having cut into the pleasantly weathered stone wall and its coping to insert his summer-house some feet into the rising hillside. I insisted that the ideal place for it was a few yards higher up the hill. Next time I saw it, the finished house had been moved up, the stone wall perfectly restored, and Arthur busy at his plain deal table with hundreds of pages of *The King's England* in course of preparation for the printers! Most of that famous series of books were edited there, as he could look out from the wide casements on one of the fairest scenes in the England he was celebrating, which may be one of the reasons why through so many volumes these books never lessened in their joyous record of the land he loved so well.

And the summer-house brings us out of doors again to tell the story of the red roses for rent. In June 1931, the West Kent Electricity Company sought permission to carry their cable under his

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drive, offering him a 'wayleave' payment. But he said he would prefer a token payment of a red rose, and quoted Burns's

*O, my luve's like a red, red rose
That's newly sprung in June.*

So, in June every year thereafter the manager of the company ceremoniously presented Arthur with a red rose, which after being carefully dried was added to his collection and kept with his treasures. He was so pleased with this fancy of his that he wrote to The Times about it. 'The youngest red rose in our English rent roll appears in the record of the Electricity Board. The first rose as rent for an electric cable was paid to me last June for the right to carry the cable under my drive at Eynsford Hill, and the red, red rose was brought to me, appropriately enough, by the daughter of the Manager of the West Kent Electricity Company, little Margaret Allbright.' The Daily Mirror sent a photographer to take a picture of the ceremony, which was mentioned in scores of his obituary notices in 1943; but there was no Arthur to receive 'a rose as rent' that June.

Where memories crowd upon me in these gardens of delight, and whole chapters could be given to them, I know that I must hold my pen. But one more I shall allow myself, because I feel that Arthur would have liked me to linger on it for a moment. A happy chance comes also as a reminder, as I have just been reading a jocular letter sent to him at Eynsford many years ago by Silas K. Hocking, one of the most popular of story writers for the million for over fifty years, who died at the age of 85 in 1935. An intimate and dear friend of mine for the last thirty-five years of his life, he had been, as we have heard, a hero of Arthur's boyhood as the author of *Her Benny* (1879). It was a happy day for Arthur and for Silas when we first came together in London, for Hocking, who had been a generation ahead of us in his activities as an author ere he finally quitted the

pulpit for the novelist's desk and settled in North London a few minutes' walk from my own home, was one of the kindest souls that either of us had ever met: a man of broad views in general, a self-confessed pessimist who exhaled geniality at every meeting. I write thus of him here, for through many of the years that Arthur was fortunate to spend on his beloved hilltop we maintained an annual meeting on a Sunday of summer when we three spent the day together at Eynsford. Mrs. Mee christened these annual meetings 'Silas's Sunday,' and although for years I saw much of Silas in my London home and in his own house of 'Heatherlow' nearby, on the 'Northern Heights,' I never missed a Silas's Sunday after I had moved my home to the south coast.

In one of his essays E. V. Lucas writes about a visit to a charming old lady, whose wealth and taste had enabled her to surround herself with all the rural joys that I have been describing at Eynsford, but with less of the excitement which brought these into being. The essayist moralised to the effect that the rich old lady was making it 'very difficult to die' in thus surrounding herself with all these hedonistic pleasures. This I questioned, as a king in his palace has no greater difficulty in dying than the ploughman in his cottage. And Arthur, with his thoughts so fixed on things immortal, did not lose sight of the fact that his life on his hilltop if it was no more than an 'immortal hour' was assuredly no less. What more could mortal ask of life?

I would even venture the thought that he could look at all the loveliness there with a certain measure of detachment, for there were times when owing to the pressure of his editorial work he found it difficult to carry on his urgent duties away from London, and for years he had a tiny suite at a pleasant hotel near Victoria Station, where he got through much of his literary work just as happily as in his library at home, being able to write his articles and his books almost anywhere if he had a table, a chair, and his fountain

pen was well charged, or a typist at hand for dictation. To him there was no iron curtain that shut off things mortal from things immortal; he knew they were all of one substance in the realm of the mind, that all the days of his life had their immortal hours of happy, inspiring work. His way of life was never in danger of falling 'into the sere, the yellow leaf': that stage when so many poor souls begin to resent the thought of growing old. He had no need to attempt the recapture of his youth. He had never lost it; certainly not until the shadows closed upon him with so little warning, and then his happy heart was stilled almost before it had known anything of the sorrow and the pathos of living which come with prolonged years of declining physical power.

On a day when he was in his early forties we were walking back after having lunched at a Pall Mall Club, and were doubtless discussing some personal problem that had recently presented itself to him (he was then much given to planning his affairs so that by means of insurances his dependants would be well provided for whatever happened to him), and possibly I had passed some criticism on a new scheme he was propounding. Suddenly he stopped in front of the National Gallery and said to me in all seriousness, 'But, Sandy, I must remember that I may live to be ninety!' My mental flash-back to this incident is vivid, the prospect he envisaged being one that had never come into my own mind without some degree of apprehension; but I am sure that to Arthur it looked not undesirable. For the moment he was picturing himself as only at the middle of life's road, having found the journey so far sufficiently enthralling to leave appetite enough for continuing as far again! With no sense of disappointment or disillusion to mar his prospect, he was concerned only to make the necessary provision for extreme old age, and on that day he had no reason to doubt which of us might be the first to quit the scene wherein we were both so joyously participating.

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The irony of fate was illustrated once again by a thing that happened on the day before his death. I had a telephone call from him asking me whether I could lunch with him at the Reform Club that day as he was going to the hospital in the afternoon to be prepared for his operation early next morning. Not expecting anything but a successful result of his operation, grave though I knew it to be, I was uneasy in my mind at having to refuse, being pledged to make one of a small party to celebrate the ninetieth birthday of a dear friend at the Savage Club. I had, however, a long telephone talk with Arthur soon after returning to my office, when, with all the liveliness and hopefulness that had characterised his talk from the day we first met fifty years before, he described to me the amenities of the private ward that had been provided for him, and the leafy charm of the garden on which his windows looked out.

By the evening of the next day that pleasing voice was stilled for ever. Yet my old friend whose ninetieth birthday denied me that last lunch with Arthur has celebrated three more birthdays since then. How various and incalculable are the lives and years of men!

Let those who have read this record of the life and work of Arthur Mee ask themselves whether the story of a man need take great count of his years. They will answer, I think, that his was a life well lived in the service of his fellow men; a full life and eminently worthy of remembrance. For epitaph we need go no further than his admired Nottingham poet, who wrote that now forgotten classic, *Festus*, more than a hundred years ago, in which he tells us that

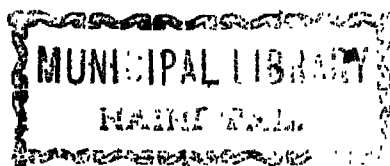
*Some will last to die out thought by thought,
Till even the burden of some ninety years
Hath crashed into them like a rock.*

While this was narrowly prophetic of the poet himself, all that we know of Arthur Mee, his character, his works, his enduring youth

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of the spirit, would have warranted our believing he stood in no danger of that fate had his years been prolonged. We ignore the years, the gaunt figure of Time has no place in our memories of him; his works will long be cherished in the hearts and thoughts of countless men and women throughout the world. The record of his life stands up well to the Festus test as applied in these fine lines of Bailey's:

*Life's more than breath and the quick round of blood,
It is a great spirit and a busy heart . . .
We live in deeds, not years; in thoughts, not breaths;
In feelings; not in figures on a dial.
We should count time by heart-throbs. He most lives
Who thinks most, feels the noblest, acts the best.*



THE END

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